

SONGS AND POLITICS IN EASTERN AFRICA



Edited by Kimani Njogu and Hervé Maupeu

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Edited by

**Kimani Njogu
Hervé Maupeu**



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Table of Contents

Foreword.....	xi
1 Religious Versification: from Depoliticisation to Repoliticisation by Kimani NJOGU	1
2 L'intellectuel populaire et l'imaginaire politique : Le cas de Joseph Kamaru by Hervé MAUPEU	23
Kamaru, un prophète kikuyu chrétien.....	28
La religion prophétique comme cadre de compréhension du politique	32
<i>Une pédagogie du changement</i>	32
<i>Une théorie de la causalité</i>	35
Kamaru et le renouveau du nationalisme kikuyu	36
<i>Un leader et pas un despote</i>	37
<i>Les élections comme mode populaire d'action politique</i>	40
<i>Les femmes et le nationalisme kikuyu contemporain</i>	42
<i>Conclusion : Kamaru et les autres mises en scène kikuyu de la nation</i>	45
3 Artistic Discourse and Gender Politics in the Gikūyũ Popular Song	
by Michael W. MWAŪRA	49
<i>Approach and method</i>	50
Roots in patriarchy of popular song expression.....	51
Patriarchal narrations	53
Entry of the Queen: the woman talks back.....	62
<i>Conclusion</i>	70
4 The Poetics of Gikūyũ mwomboko: Narrative as a Technique in HIV-AIDS Awareness Campaign in Rural Kenya by Mwangi P. MŪHORO	73
<i>Introduction</i>	73
Socio-historical origins of <i>Mwomboko</i> poetry	74
Performance of <i>Mwomboko</i> poetry.....	77

	Arrangement and dance movements in <i>Mwomboko</i>	78
	Music and entertainment in response to HIV-Aids awareness.....	82
	The language of <i>Mwomboko</i> singers	84
	<i>Conclusion</i>	92
5	Hip-hop in Nairobi: recognition of an international movement and the main means of expression for the urban youth in poor residential areas	
	by Aurélia FERRARI.....	107
	From street “free style”, to the studio, to the stage: the case of Kalamashaka and Mau Mau camp	110
	<i>The beginning of hip-hop in Nairobi</i>	110
	<i>Different influences</i>	111
	<i>The beginning of success</i>	112
	<i>Problems encountered</i>	115
	<i>The rappers’ hopes</i>	116
	Lyrics: the division between militant and non-militant rap	117
	<i>Language of choice</i>	117
	<i>Major themes covered</i>	118
	<i>Conclusion</i>	124
6	Folk poetry as a weapon of struggle: an analysis of the Chaka Mchaka resistance songs of the national resistance movement/army of Uganda	
	by Musambayi KATUMANGA.....	129
	<i>Introduction</i>	129
	Resistance process and mobilisation	130
	<i>Mosaic Types</i>	138
	<i>Fixed Line Folklores</i>	142
	<i>Narrative Poetics</i>	147
7	Ethnic Identity and Stereotypes in Popular Music: <i>Mugiithi</i> Performance in Kenya	
	by Maina wa MŪTONYA	157
	<i>Introduction</i>	157
	Music and Identity	162
	Stereotypes and Ethnic Identity.....	164
	Cultural Nights	170
	Mau Mau Lyrics.....	170
	<i>Conclusion</i>	172

8	Song and Politics : the case of D. Owino Misiani	
	by Adams OLOO	177
	<i>Introduction</i>	177
	Luo music and the Kenyan political scene.....	181
	Owino Misiani	182
	Beyond Kenya: Misiani on governance in Africa.....	183
	Analysing the Kenyan political scene through music	185
	Change of tactic: from controversy to support for the Government	192
	Return to controversy	193
	<i>Conclusion</i>	198
9	Orature of Combat: Cultural Aesthetics of Song as Political Action in the Performance of the Mau Mau Songs	
	by Bantu MWAURA	201
	The Aesthetics of Gikuyu Orature in the Mau Mau Songs	204
	Song as Political Action	216
	Song as Orature of Combat.....	220
10	Resistance and Performance Dynamics: the case of <i>busungusungu</i> vigilantes' dance of the Sukuma of Tanzania	
	by Herbert F. MAKOYE	225
	<i>Introduction</i>	225
	The Sukuma and Sungusungu	226
	Dance and song as a means of communication	228
	<i>Conclusion</i>	240
11	Music and Politics in Tanzania: a case study of <i>Nyota-wa-Cigogo</i>	
	by Frowin Paul NYONI	241
	<i>Introduction</i>	241
	Music forms in Tanzania	242
	<i>Kwaya</i>	242
	<i>Taarab</i>	243
	<i>Jazz-band</i>	244
	<i>Dance</i>	245
	<i>Ngonjera</i>	246
	Historical Overview of Music and Politics in Tanzania	246
	<i>The early days of independence</i>	246

	<i>The Arusha Declaration</i>	248
	<i>Party supremacy and its control over the arts</i>	249
	<i>Democratisation process (multiparty political system)</i>	252
	Case Study: Nyota-wa-Cigogo	253
	<i>Nyota-wa-Cigogo: performance</i>	261
	<i>Conclusion</i>	270
12	Hip-hop, Westernization and Gender in East Africa	
	by Mwenda NTARANGWI	273
	<i>Introduction</i>	273
	The Emergence of Hip-Hop in East Africa	275
	Hip-Hop in East Africa: a new phenomenon or old tradition?	281
	Hip-Hop and Westernization	284
	Hip-hop and Gendered Identities	290
	<i>Conclusions</i>	299
13	Thematising Election Politics in Swahili Epic: the case of Mahmoud Abdulkadir	
	by Rayya TIMAMMY	303
14	Formation of a Popular Music: Hip-hop in Tanzania	
	by Alice BANCET	315
	<i>Introduction</i>	315
	<i>Hip-hop: a definition</i>	316
	Globalisation of a culture: the case of Tanzanian hip-hop.....	318
	<i>From New York ghettos to Dar es Salaam</i>	318
	<i>Introduction of hip-hop in Tanzania, a contemporary of uwazi</i> ..	322
	<i>Heavy resistance to “muziki ya kibuni”</i>	324
	<i>From American mimicry to the original creation of rap in Kiswahili</i>	327
	<i>Initial attempts to promote hip-hop</i>	330
	<i>Improved media coverage and popularization of hip-hop</i>	332
	<i>The consecration of Kiswahili rap—mapinduzi halisi ya Bongo Flava</i>	334
	Confirmation of hip-hop with political and social leanings.....	338
	<i>The spokespeople for a society in crisis</i>	339
	<i>Political and civic rap</i>	346

	<i>Artistes' involvement in the defence and maintenance of authentic hip-hop rap</i>	351
	<i>Conclusion</i>	352
15	The enduring power of Somali “oral political poetry”: songs and poems of peace in the midst of chaos	
	by Chantal LOGAN	355
	The Somali crisis: a political milieu favourable to the spoken word	357
	Oral political poetry: an unbroken continuum.....	361
	Peace making and poetry	365
	Women and peace poetry	368
16	If you're ugly, know how to sing: aesthetics of resistance and subversion	
	by Lupenga MPHANDE.....	377

Foreword

This book brings together important essays on songs and politics in eastern Africa and beyond. Through an analysis of the voices from the margins, the authors enter into the debate on cultural productions and political change. The theme that cuts across the contributions in this book is that songs are, in addition to their aesthetic appeal, vital tools with which to explore how political and social events are shaped and understood by citizens. Although the discussions focus on Africa, the issues raised are, in fact, global. In the Philippines, for instance, during the Spaniard occupation revolutionary songs mobilized the *indios* and in the late 19th century *kundiman* (love song) was a precursor to subversive and revolutionary lyrics. As Caparas (2004) observes, *“Being courted was not a woman, but freedom for the Motherland, most famously embodied as ‘Jocelynang Baliwag’. The songs of lament would continue even after the Spaniards left and through the American and Japanese occupation.”*

In the United States of America, around the 1700s, there were elegies on the painful birth of a New Nation and on issues of injustice, identity and oppression. The election song ‘*God Save George Washington*’ was sung to the rhythm and melody of ‘*God Save the Queen*.’ For centuries, election jingles in the USA have been recreated in the melody of existing compositions. Indeed, around the world, during political contests, politicians use the jingle and theme songs to penetrate the mind and emotions of voters. The jingle is a mnemonic which compresses the name and political platform of the contender in a memorable fashion. President Franklin Roosevelt used the theme ‘*Happy Days are Here Again*’ to lift the diminishing morale of Americans after the Depression and World War II.

Urbanization, commercialization and globalization have contributed to the vibrancy of East African popular music of the 1990s which is marked by hybridity, syncretism and innovativeness. It is a product of social processes and not separable from society, politics, and critical issues of the day. The lyrics explore social cosmology, worldviews, class and gender relations, interpretations of value systems,

and other political, social and cultural practices, even as they entertain and provide momentary escape for audience members. Frustrations, disenchantment, and emotional fatigue resulting from corrupt and dictatorial political systems that stifle the potential of citizens have driven popular music in most of Africa. Musicians have sought to de-ethnicize politics and economic activities and global themes such as HIV/AIDS, drugs, migrations, religious, exploitation and greed have found a place in contemporary African music.

Songs reflect and shape social life. Among the Maasai, for example, the ceremonial song *Engilakinoto* is sung after a victorious lion hunt. *Engilakinoto* follows a deep rhythmic chant and powerful vertical leaps by warriors in a display of strength, courage and prowess. Whether in the accompaniment of the *Sikuti* drums, among the Luhya, the Nyatiti stringed instrument among the Luo, or the Ngoma drums in *taarab* music among the Waswahili, songs speak to composers and audiences in fundamental ways and in the process shape perspectives, change attitudes, question authority, challenge human weakness, cajole and rebuke. Contemporary popular music in Kenya manifests itself as a merging of the local and the foreign; a creative modification of what is received from the past as well as other cultures, including the rumba beat from the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Kenya when one listens to D.O. Misiiani, Eric Wainaina, Daudi Kabaka, Joseph Kamaru, Isaiah Mwinamo, David Amunga, John Nzenze, Them Mushrooms, Joseph Kariuki, Susan Owiyo, Mighty King Kong, Albert Gacheru, Achieng' Abura, Lovi and Christian Longomba, David Mathenge (Nameless), Esther Wahome, Poxi Presha, Wahu Mathenge, Queen Jane and many other contemporary musicians, one gets a sense of the intense contradictions in our society. Eric Wainaina, blends African guitar riffs with Western rhythms, and in *Sawa Sawa* and *Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo* on corruption in Kenya, he voices the concerns of ordinary people about lack of accountability and transparency. Equally, through the use of *sheng* youth slang, rap and reggae beats, songs by Kalamashaka, Necessary Noize led by the female vocalist Nazizi, including those by the late E-Sir (Issa Omari) of *Boomba Train* fame, are statements about the challenges facing African youth in a globalising world. They explore a wide range of individual, local and global concerns, contradictions, and desires.

The national desire for change in Kenya was brought to the fore by artists during the run-up to the 2002 General Elections, in which the then ruling party KANU was removed from power. Two musicians, Joseph Ogidi and Jahd Adonijah, under the name GidiGidi MajiMaji, performed *Ting Badi Malo* and *Unbwogable* to the great delight of voters. *Unbwogable* became the song with which to mobilise voters in support of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). Since then, members of the political class have consistently mobilised and hired artistes to sing their praises and to support their political platforms. We witnessed this during the November 2005 National Referendum on the Draft Constitution of Kenya. The government and the opposition hired the imagination of artistes so that they could generate support for their political position. Unfortunately, this affinity with the political class is exploitative and does not lead to concrete steps in the promotion of culture and the arts.

Like the *Chimurenga* resistance songs in Zimbabwe, the Mau Mau songs in Kenya were key in creating solidarity among the people in order to deal with the colonial onslaught. Christian songs were rewritten in order to deal with secular themes. This tendency is discussed in Chapter One on religious versification in this collection of essays. The author shows that evangelising hymns were turned upside-down during the struggle for independence in order to speak about earthly relations between the rulers and the ruled. If the role of Christianity in the colonial project was to pacify African souls, that did not happen in its entirety. In post-independent Kenya, side by side with the resistance songs, were praise songs by established bands and the Christian-dominated *Muungano* Choir which sought to perpetuate a hegemonic relation between the rulers and the ruled, to valorize national leadership, as well as give their interpretation of patriotism. The post-colonial government sponsored choirs which composed music to perpetuate hegemonic normalcy and maintain the socio-political status quo. This interpretation of patriotism was naturally questioned by other musicians who aligned themselves with the needs of ordinary people, such as Joseph Kamaru and D.O. Misiani.

In his discussion of Kamaru's music, Hervé Maupeu shows that the singer blends with audience members due to the relevance and aptness of his lyrics in the socio-political terrain and his sensitivity to language.

Maupeu's *L'intellectuel populaire et l'imaginaire politique* is an engaging reflection of the political thought of Joseph Kamaru within the context of Gikuyu nationalism. An immensely creative artist, Kamaru uses rich metaphoric language and is admired by his audience for his mastery of Gikuyu proverbs and idioms, and his ability to weave in and out of complex social and political issues. During the Moi regime, Kamaru often had to operate through double edged meanings and ambiguities to capture the ambivalences of society and to keep the fangs of the state away. His music brings to the fore issues of gender relations, identity, power, and socio-economic tensions in East Africa. This musician, who for three decades sung powerful secular music, started singing religious songs in 1993 and is the Chairman of the Kenya Association of Phonographic Industries (KAPI) which aims at defending the rights of musicians and coordinating musical activity. His vision is "*to bring all musicians together...to go out there and expose talent.*" (*Daily Nation*, 7 July, 2006). In his heyday, Kamaru oscillated between praising and criticising the regimes of both Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi. His music was immensely enriched by the benga beats, created by Daniel Owino Misiani, a Tanzanian based in Kenya, who passed away in a road accident on 17 May, 2006. Gikuyu popular music is a window through which gender politics and the discourse of masculinity could be understood. In 'Artistic Discourse and Gender Politics' Michael Wainaina traces aspects of the narrative in popular songs in patriarchy as embedded in orature. Significantly, because women have limited access to social circuits and instruments of production of the popular song, males dominate the genre. But the female voice is not muted—it finds expression in Jane Nyambura *a.k.a.* Queen Jane who takes the male gender head-on showing it as unreliable, selfish and greedy. The 'singing back' by Queen Jane serves to unmask patriarchy and to show gender inequalities in African societies.

An important global theme is HIV and AIDS, the pandemic that is destroying families throughout the continent. In 'The Poetics of Gikuyu *Mwomboko*' Mwangi Muhoro discusses the crafting of narrative threads to address the scourge. The *Mwomboko* genre, a consequence of the colonial experience and consolidated in the 1930s with the Independent Schools Movement in Central Kenya, was used as a mobilising tool during the Mau Mau liberation struggle, discussed by Bantu Mwaura

in 'Orature of Combat.' Indeed, as Musambayi Katumanga shows us in an analysis of the folk poetry of the National Resistance Movement Chaka Mchaka resistance songs in Uganda, artistic productions can be used to develop a culture of resistance and to challenge oppressive authority. In southern Africa the *ingoma* songs have for centuries played a socio-political role, as Lupenga Mphande argues, and in Tanzania the *busungusungu* vigilante songs, discussed by Herbert Makoye and the *Nyota-wa-cigogo* troupe analysed by Frowin Nyoni, draw on cultural symbols in making political commentaries. Nyoni shows that changes in the social and political arena can lead to changes in the creative world. Political events could ignite creativity as Rayya Timammy articulates in her discourse on election politics and poetic rendition at the Kenyan coast. In the midst of political and social chaos, oral poetry could bring peace as Chantal Logan argues with reference to Somali oral poetry.

In Nairobi and Central Kenya, Friday night life in urban centres is incomplete without an experience of '*mugithi*' (the train dance) which was generated by the depressing socio-economic circumstances in the 1990s. By singing *mugithi* the Gikuyu middle-class at the time sought to consolidate Gikuyu nationalism, a reaction to over two decades of Moi's reign in which that community felt politically and economically excluded by the government. Thus, the genre is a space for the mobilisation and consolidation of ethnic interests; not in a socially disruptive sense but as a historicising and contextualising reference point for the community. It is both a celebration of the city and sex as well as a site for negotiation, contestation and realignment of identities. In the carnivalesque spirit of *Mugithi*, all caution and reticence is suspended and patrons unknown to each other, link up in the Train Dance, touching each other's body and making sexually suggestive movements with the parts of the lower body. It occupies a liminal place between the past and the present. Creatively extracted from the evangelical churches and the music about the need to join the 'train to heaven', the genre has been appropriated by the night spots and has spread out to the secular world. This music, made possible through the one-man guitar, does in a sense contest technology and digitalization of cultural productions. It has also made the bar a site for popular performance capable of blending mimicry, parody and social commentary. *Mugithi* brings newness to the old and suspends social prohibitions. On Friday nights, all music—from the DRC to

Jamaica—is modified to suit the predominantly Gikuyu patrons, so that ‘Murder She Wrote’ becomes ‘*Mama Ciru*’. The intertextual blending is also a statement on the fluidity of identities. This is the subject of Maina Mutonya’s chapter.

While drawing from the oral tradition, Gikuyu musicians have been immensely influenced by the *benga* beat, originally sung by D.O. Misiiani, discussed by Adams Oloo. D.O. Misiiani was an incisive and fearless artist who composed satirical lyrics critical of the political class and was arrested on many occasions. In the early 1970s song *Kalamindi*, he criticises Kenyatta’s development policy which perpetuated class and regional inequalities. During the struggle for multiparty democracy in Kenya and after the death of the then Foreign Minister Robert Ouko, he was extradited by Moi’s government for ‘fueling discontent’ in his music. After the December 2002 elections in Kenya, Misiiani was arrested after releasing *Bim en Bim* (A baboon will remain a baboon) on political betrayal. He took an interest in pan-African issues including coups, assassinations, ethnic conflicts and traversed the continent in his imagination. In *Wayuak ni Piny* (We Cry for the World) Misiiani sings about the Iraq War and criticises George Bush for ruining the lives of Iraqis.

But the *benga* beat does not resonate well with the urban youth who have significant access to global media. Instead it is hip-hop, a trans-cultural genre encapsulated in rap music and expressed through speech, clothing, video, attitude, disposition, activism, graffiti, and body movement, which holds sway. Hip-hop has its origins in Brooklyn, New York, and its power was quite evident on 13 September, 1996 at the burial of twenty-five year old Tupac Shakur and in March 1997 after the death of Christopher Wallace, *a.k.a.* Notorious B.I.G. Through hip-hop, Black youth have become visible and their images, significantly manipulated by multinational corporations, is attached to advertisements. Additionally, the youth feel segregated and excluded from the economic arena and they use hip-hop to speak back at authority. Hip-hop is unlocking the public sphere so that voices from the youth can be heard. In the United States, the hip-hop culture was a consequence of alienation, police brutality and the criminal justice system, segregation and exclusion, information technology and globalisation as well as the media representation of Black youth (Bakari Kitwana 2002: 18). Aurélie

Ferrari, Mwenda Ntarangwi and Alice Bancet discuss hip-hop in East Africa and show that it is a global culture which crosses borders and embraces socio-economic realities.

Songs and Politics in Eastern Africa is an extremely important addition to the study of popular culture and its role in shaping society. Songs are a window into the life of society and an illuminator of socio-political reality. They are worth serious study.

Kimani Njogu, Nairobi
July 2006

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Religious Versification: from Depoliticisation to Repoliticisation

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The missionary language of derision is basically a cultural position, the impression of an ethnocentric outlook. The aspects of refutation and demonstration rationalize the initial ethnocentric moment and are aimed explicitly towards an intellectual reduction that would complement the rules of orthodoxy and conformity

V.Y. Mudimbe 1988: 52

Is politicisation through Christian songs one of the unexpected consequences of evangelization? Has Christianity, even without invoking liberation theology contributed in shaping politics through the interpretation and performance of songs? Right from the onset, modern Christianity received multiple interpretations in Kenya. Although Johann Ludwig Krapf of the Church Missionary Society had established himself in Mombasa in 1844, his was not the first Christian encounter with Kenyan people. Roman Catholic missionaries had been to the Coast in the 16th and 17th centuries. They aimed at opening up commercial opportunities for Portugal in Portuguese East India Empire. However, their evangelical work on the Kenyan coast was subverted by Yusuf Hassan, a Muslim they had sent to Goa to be inducted into Christianity. Hassan was baptised and named Don Jerome Chingulia. On returning from Goa, Chingulia was made ruler of Mombasa, Malindi and Pate both as atonement for the murder of his father, the Sultan of Mombasa, and in recognition of his conversion. Nevertheless, the question was, had Chingulia really converted? He found solace in Islam instead of Christianity.

In 1631, he organised an attack on Fort Jesus and all Portuguese who

refused to convert to Islam were killed. Although Yusuf Bin Hassan did not succeed in convincing the Bajuni and the Wazanzibari to rise against the Portuguese, his revolt set in motion a range of rebellions against foreign domination. Indeed, this attack led to the final overthrow of the Portuguese along the whole of the East Coast in 1689 by a combination of local forces and forces of Oman. Religious pursuits could not be divorced from political engagement.

Kenya is currently a convergence of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and traditional belief systems. A closer look at these religious persuasions shows, however, that they are deliberately contextualised in practice so that they are more responsive to culture and local events. Organised religion is a strong force in contemporary Kenya and until the 1980s the main “*Christian denominations served as effective agents of social control and acceptable political expression*” (Miller and Yeager, 1994: 92). Since then, and especially during the Moi era which ended in 2002, suppression of dissent and the institutionalisation of corruption led to a reconsideration of the role of religious groups in politics. Although the Islamic Party of Kenya was not registered by the Kenya government, it had a strong following on the Kenyan Coast in the run-up to multiparty politics.

Religion had, in fact, been always linked to politics, especially through an intertextualisation of hymns and sacred books. Religion in Africa has tended to be double-voiced and to signify multiple readings (Bakhtin, 1981; Njogu, 2004). Indeed, the colonial experience brought with it a range of creative activities that are worth serious consideration. For instance, Christianity was reformulated and made indigenous in order to be more responsive to the political, economic, social and cultural lives of the colonised. The Bible and Christian hymns were creatively translated and subverted in order to engage and negotiate with the West on the relationship that would prevail between the colonisers and the colonised. The development of new words and an alternative vocabulary was a purposeful, popular and continuous strategy of doing political and social work. The inversion of an earlier religious discourse—articulated by Missionaries—was an attempt at developing a novel, innovative and syncretic language for political engagement. As we shall see presently, the translation and linguistic inversions were acts of inscription; they were statements of a new vision

and purpose embedded in the new vocabulary because, following Rorty (1989: 13), redefining or inventing words makes new intellectual work possible. New words and statements make possible the inscriptions and solidification of new community aims and objectives within the context of colonial exploitation and repression. With regard to religious texts, especially during the colonial period in Central Kenya, the original aim of mental pacification of populations, on the promise of a better afterlife, was to be later grounded and given substance through political re-textualising. This paper examines the extent to which this has taken place in Central Kenya, with specific reference to the colonial period. In doing so, I draw on examples of religious songs and the ways in which they were translated, inverted and represented as poignant political statements aimed at limiting the “*power of outside authorities over their households*” (Peterson, 2004: 35). Also, I develop the argument further by examining Bob Marley’s songs in the Rastafarian movement and the way Christian images are re-contextualised in the African diaspora.

In most of Africa, the Bible and the imperial flag advanced together and Christian missions were viewed as the vanguard of European hegemony. Ideological domination sought to create, consolidate and maintain political quiescence by masking subordination and exploitation so that popular revolt may be blocked (Schatzberg, 1988: 27). To this end, Christianity became a double-edged sword of civilizing and oppressing (Haynes, 1996: 55). According to Haynes (1996: 24):

Mission churches...were an important facet of attempted colonial cultural domination, with both repressive and liberating functions; they were agents of both European superiority and political domination and purveyors of modernization, especially Western education, which was quickly recognised by Africans as the key to advancement in colonial society.

However, the cultural and political dominations were constantly contested and challenged, sometimes through religiously motivated anti-colonial actions such as the *Maji Maji* rebellion in Tanzania, the *Mũthirīgũ* songs of the 1930s in Central Kenya, added to the founding of African independent churches throughout Africa. The independent churches became important spaces for the realisation of nationalist aspirations.

The East African Scottish Mission was established in 1891 in Kibwezi and its first sponsor was Sir William MacKinnon, chairman of the

Imperial British East Africa Company. The Kibwezi station was closed in 1899 due to the serious cases of malaria and MacKinnon moved to Thogoto, near Nairobi. Thogoto drew its name from the word ‘Scot’ through a process of phonological adaptation. The Church of Scotland accepted responsibility for the mission in 1901 and permanently inscribed itself in Central Kenya. Moreover, the setting up of the Church of Scotland was the beginning of a concerted campaign to win over the spirit of the Gĩkũyũ people by re-engaging traditional religion. By learning the Gĩkũyũ language, comparing Gĩkũyũ belief systems and Christianity and translating hymns, catechisms, sections of the Old and New Testament, the missionaries sought to enter into the psyche of the Gĩkũyũ people and to seek to comprehend their world through songs and linguistic imagery.

The creative inversions of religious songs and other texts that I discuss below had been anticipated rather ironically by the tendency of the missionaries to invent concepts in their evangelising mission. For instance, Peterson (2004: 49–50) discusses the invention of the word ‘*mehia*’ to represent ‘sin’, in order to serve the purposes of Christianity. Derived from the term ‘*kwĩhia*’ (to do wrong) the term ‘*mehia*’ falls short of the pivotal Christian concept ‘sin’, crucial for repentance and acceptance of the Gospel. In Gĩkũyũ, the word connotes ‘wrong-doing’ not infractions against an unchanging moral code enacted by a Supreme Being. This is because, as Peterson correctly observes, *Ngai* gave no commandments from his seat on Mount Kĩrĩnyaga, unlike God of the Old Testament, who did so in South Sinai. The concept of ‘*maathani*’ (commandments) was alien in Central Kenya and was inscribed into the Gĩkũyũ socio-religious code in order to deal with matters of repentance, redemption and salvation. For, as Peterson again correctly notes, “*without laws to break, there could be no sin, and no need for repentance.*” The inventions and semantic expansions implemented by missionaries and Arthur Barlow, Marion Stevenson, John Arthur and Henry Scott among others were an effort to shift the Gĩkũyũ belief system so that they can recognise and accept unconditionally the immaterial transcendence of God.

But the shift was to be bumpy—the Gĩkũyũ insisted on grounding European theology by making it real, corporeal and responsive to their daily struggles in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres.

Significantly, although colonial administrations tried to employ religion in the pursuit of political domination, (Haynes, 1996: 25), Africans used religious beliefs to renegotiate and adjust the relationship between themselves and the forces of domination in their midst. This was done through the founding of independent churches, Africanisation of Islam and Christianity and the rewriting of religious texts and songs.

The rewriting of Christian dogma achieved a number of goals. First, through indigenization of the foreign belief system it functioned to mobilise and unify communities and create a sense of shared purpose in resisting European hegemony. Second, there were major social concerns that the new religion circumvented and which were urgent and germane to the lives of the African people—poverty, health, education, moral decadence, food. The rewriting of Christian teachings, even when they were revivalist, sought to foreground these immediate social concerns. Third, Christian missions had ignored the thirst for higher education among their followers; an education that was critical for the material well-being of families. Whereas the colonial regime sought to perpetuate basic education for the service of settler and administrative interests, the African population argued for an education that would facilitate engagement at the national and global levels. Though one might be tempted to view the rewriting as a purely cultural affair, it was in fact a political act of self-assertion and an articulation of a larger vision of liberation from colonial yoke.

It is important to understand the role of religion, especially in Africa, through the concept of hegemony and its relationship to power and control. Hegemony refers to acquisition of power through consensus and acquiescence. But there is another dimension to hegemony—force (Cox, 1993: 286; Haynes, 1996: 7). According to Haynes:

... the use of force to gain compliance will be the last, or at least not the first option. Indeed, force wielded by the dominant against the subordinate will not be necessary (or only very rarely) if that domination is seen as legitimate even necessary. In other words, force will not be resorted to as long as the subordinate classes regard upper-class domination as right and proper, or at least tolerable.

Because might alone is insufficient to ensure domination, rulers have tended to keep social relations relatively consensual through the invocation of general concepts such as civilization, national unity,

development, self-determination and so on. Religious dogma has been used in softening subordinates, through song, prayer, preaching and the promise of a better afterlife. Moreover, religious leaders are not disinterested parties in state affairs. If the state in Africa is a rapacious structure of interlinked interests which create, nurture and perpetuate clientèlistic and patronage relationships where public institutions are individualised, colonised and emasculated (Bates, 1993: 419), as well as a space in which we witness a hegemonic process in the pursuit of power (Haynes, 1996: 9), then religious leaders stand to gain if they can contribute in the maintenance of the status quo. In many cases, this is achieved through claims that political leadership is God-ordained.

In most of Africa, songs have been used in mobilising communities. For example, in 1899, the song '*Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika*' (God Bless Africa) composed by Enoch Sontoga, a mission teacher, was sung during the ordination of Rev. M. Boweni, a Methodist Minister. The song—inspired, composed and given life within the context of Christianity—was to be adopted as the anthem of the African National Congress (ANC) and currently represents the spirit of struggle of the African people as the national anthem of South Africa.

In South Africa, Mandela was compared to Jesus Christ the Saviour, during that country's struggle for independence. The people sang in Isizulu:

Jesu uzobuya manje
Masizilũngĩselele
Khona manje, khona manje
U Mandela uzobuya manje
Masizilũngĩselele
Khona manje, khona manje

Jesus is coming back very soon
 Let's prepare ourselves
 Right now, right now
 Mandela is coming back very soon
 Let's prepare ourselves
 Right now, right now

The invocation of a Christian redeemer during political turmoil in most nation-states of the developing world serves to give home that things would indeed be better. The people are encouraged to prepare themselves by following the vision of the Saviour. The urgency of the preparedness is captured in 'very soon' and 'right now'.

Bildad Kaggia in *Roots of Freedom 1921–1963* (1975) shows that local language newspapers such as *Mũiguithania*, *Sauti ya Mwafrica*

and others were key in civic education and in the mobilisation of communities for self-determination. He also discusses the important role played by *Nyĩmbo* (songs) which carried messages of unity, agitation, frustration, hope and determination. They were a rallying call for the masses to unite and engage European colonialism. Although the songs made reference to land as the central bone of contention, they were in fact, statements in pursuit of freedom and liberty. Land was symbolic of the people's lifeline taken away by the colonial experience. Land in Central Kenya, and in most of Africa, is important not just for economic reasons but even more so as a spiritual space; a reaffirmation of humanity and connectedness with the energies of the past. Thus, reference to the alienation of land in songs is a political statement on the ills of colonialism.

At the Kenya African Union (KAU) meeting at Nyeri, the song of Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi was sung by over 30,000 people in unison (Barnett and Njama, 1966: 75):

*Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi what do you think?
You were robbed of your land, you didn't sell it.*

Chorus:
*Kĩnyatta leads, Koinange at the rear and Mbiyũ on the flank
Each a good shepherd of the masses
We have been demanding the return of the African lands
And we will never give up.*

If the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised *vis-à-vis* land was that of willing buyer—willing seller, the narrator avers then the struggle would have been well grounded. But it was not. Rather, land was taken by force and the masses needed to congregate around their leaders. The rhetorical question and the answer point to the quest for fairness and liberation. During the prosecution of Jomo Kenyatta in Kapenguria, mobilisation songs featured prominently. The colonial government recognised the power of the songs in keeping the spirit of liberation alive and hence banned them, together with the vernacular newspapers. Nonetheless, the songs remained on the lips of the people in prisons, detention camps, forests and villages. Most of the songs composed by Kĩnũthia Mũgĩa and published by Gakaara wa Wanjaũ and Muthee Cheche were sung by ordinary people in Central Kenya and the Rift Valley.

Christian tunes in *Hymns: Ancient and Modern* were utilised to carry new messages. Like the spirituals in the African diaspora, Kenyan liberation songs sought freedom in this world and used the story of the Israelites in captivity as a metaphor of the domination of the African people by colonialism. In the song ‘*Brethren*’, images of the Old Testament are invoked and politicised. Jomo Kenyatta is presented as a messiah who would deliver his people from colonial oppression, just like Moses delivered the Israelites;

*Remember when Jomo was told by Jehovah:
“You will go to Europe to get salvation for the children...”
Brethren, and sisters and children
Listen, this is how KAU wants you to get salvation:*

*Jomo went to Europe to fulfill the mission
We should realise it was lies when we were told he is dead.*

*Satan are the people who betray citizens to white men
Where shall they go when we take over the land?
They will be destroyed like Sodom*

*Remember the stories about Harun with Israel
When Moses left them and went to speak to God
He found that they had already sinned
They were destroyed in the desert because of idols.*

*Do you want to be destroyed by Jehovah for worshipping idols?
Don’t have fear in your hearts because God is in Heaven
God is in Heaven—we shall get our land taken from us long time ago*

This nationalist ideology draws on Christian images of Jehovah, Satan, Sodom, betrayal, worship, Moses, idols, the desert, and so on to strongly advocate for unity in the liberation struggle. The experiences of Mount Sinai are re-enacted to address a political situation around Mount Kenya. The tune and the imagery also serve to carry along the belief that the liberation struggle was sanctioned by God. The use of alliteration, similes and rhetorical questions entrench the meaning targeted by the narrative voice and are important tools of persuasion. Other mobilisation songs such as “*what are you waiting for?*” speak directly to the masses urging them to join forces under KAU because “*unity is strength.*” They sang that the God of the youth does not sleep.

*Ngai wa hũũni ndakomaga
Mbama ndiācinirwo
Tondũ mbama ingiācinirwo
Hũũni niingiakuire
Majengo hakuhi rūũ
Niho mwaki warĩ
Niho Ngai wa Gikũyũ
Aitagĩrĩrio maguta
Mwaki warĩ wa kũgegania
Tondũ ndwahoraga
Athũngũ mamakire mũno
Nĩũndu wa Gikũyũ
Andũ othe a nyũmba ya Mũmbi
Moimanĩite thuutha maroreete
Karendonia makiugaga, Thaa!*

The God of young people never dozes
Mbama was not burned down
Because if Mbama had been burned down
Young men would have died
Majengo near the river
That is where the fire was
It was at the place the God of Agikũyũ
Was being anointed
It was a wonderful fire
Because it never went off
Europeans were most perplexed
By the Agikũyũ
All people of the house of Mũmbi
They all walked one behind one another
Walking to Caledonia singing, *Thaa!*

The youth are shielded and spared because their God never dozes. He is always awake and protective. At Majengo, near Nairobi River, the God of the *Agikũyũ* was being anointed and the fire never went off. Fire, as a symbol of the presence of God, is a constant image in the Old Testament. Moses experiences God for the first time through the burning bush in the Sinai. The fire becomes a source of resoluteness and courage for those seeking justice and liberty. Hence, the house of *Mũmbi* (the *Agikũyũ*) walked to Caledonia singing ‘*Thaa!*’ (peace). The lyrics were, to a large extent, an affirmation of divine support in the pursuit of justice and liberty.

The songs were also a celebration of the sacrifices, determination, courage and clarity of the leaders in the struggle. In ‘*Believe in God*’, for example, the masses are encouraged to follow their leaders in order to reap the fruits of their suffering and pain.

*Believe in God and leave troubles alone
He will show you all good things
And remove all evils from you
And you will get inheritance through Jomo
Believe in Jomo, believe in Mbiyũ and trust in him.*

*Believe in Mbiyũ and you will realise
That if you believe in God you will survive
Let’s follow Achieng Oneko
We get an inheritance—through Jomo.
Believe in Jomo and be like Achieng*

*Emerge from darkness to the light
All the dead will be repaid
And those imprisoned will be released.*

*Believe in KAU and preach to others
If they believe in KAU they will rejoice
All the traitors will be deported
And they will have nobody to tell about KAU.*

*Believe in Mbiyũ, Believe in KAU
Believe in Jomo and trust in him*

The masses are urged to have faith and to believe and trust in their leaders and the party KAU. Through belief and trust they will discover a world of opportunity, knowledge, self-discovery and redemption. Through faith, they would realise their dreams of a better life. Belief and faith are key ingredients of Christianity and are here invoked as a unifying ideology for political liberation. The Christian doctrine is crafted around unswerving faith and trust in Jesus Christ. The Messiah becomes the fulfilment of our desire as human beings to find an object, person or cause to serve and worship. If faith is the action of placing trust in an object or individual viewed as worthy of allegiance, obedience and services then it is a critical phenomenon in the relationship between leaders and followers. During the pursuit of social change, faith and trust in selfless leadership and the principles, values and moral appropriateness of the shared vision are key. In the Bible, faith and trust are best captured in the relationship between Jesus and the disciples: “*they were gripped by a faith that survived even though greatly tested*” (John 6: 68).

Cultural productions—songs, performances, visual arts, poetry—cannot ignore the glaring inequalities and inequities that are so prevalent in the world. Many governments have crafted policies that favour the wealthy at the expense of working families. Political bigwigs have sometimes used obfuscation to advance an illusion of ‘development’; adjusting, manipulating, shaping, slicing and selectively presenting data in an attempt to cloud the reality on the ground. At other times, they have resorted to name calling in order to shift the discourse of inequality. By claiming that those seeking greater equity and equality are manipulated by ‘external forces’ or that they are engaging in “*the politics of envy*” as was constantly presented by the regime of Daniel arap

Moi in Kenya, the ruling class seeks to mark the pro-people arguments as ill-intentioned. Political songs from Africa have tended to present an alternative view—that when there is corruption, denial of basic rights and freedoms, limiting of democratic space and ineptitude of the leaders, the water does truly become bitter and would need a purifier. The lyrics have attempted to amplify the dilemma and challenges facing ordinary people and in order to do so have rewritten ancient religious texts to comment on contemporary political issues.

For example, the song ‘*Maĩ nĩ Marũrũ*’ by the Gathaithi Church Choir, in the 1970s, attempted to capture the decay that pervaded Kenya during the sunset years of Jomo Kenyatta. The song, later banned by the government, was an attempt to mobilise the country to re-examine itself in the face of glaring social difficulties accentuated by corruption and a self-serving leadership.

MAI NI MARŪRŪ

*Musa werũ-inĩ gĩthima kĩa Mara,
Maĩ marũra makĩaga kũnyũka,
Kirĩndĩ gĩothe gĩkũũria Musa:
Nĩ marũrũ, tũkũnyua kĩ?
Ona rĩu, maĩ no marũrũ,
Kuuma mũcĩ nginya mawĩrainĩ,
Kuuma ciana nginya andũ agima
Nĩ marũrũ, tũkũnyua kĩ?*

*Musa ahoya nĩ erirwo nĩ Ngai,
Aikie maĩ mũtĩ magĩe cama,
Aikia mũtĩ maĩ makiagĩra,
Kirĩndĩ kianyua gĩkĩnyotoka.*

*Mũtumia mena mũthuriwe,
Marahĩtania niũndũ mũnyinyi,
Makĩranaga ti tawe ndendaga,
Tondũ maĩ nĩ marũrũ.*

*Wathĩĩ wabici ũkĩenda ũteithio,
Ugakora mũndũ mũrakaru,
Woiga ũtonye agakwĩra ndĩ ‘busy’,
Tondũ maĩ nĩ marũrũ.*

*Utharia nagueo no ũraingĩha,
Uragani, ũici na ũtũnyani,
Makĩgeria gũkenia mũĩri,
Tondũ maĩ nĩ marũrũ.*

Ta uria Musa erirwo nĩ Ngai,

THE WATER IS BITTER

Moses in the plains at Mara well
When the water became too bitter to drink
The masses asked Moses:
It is bitter, what shall we drink?
Even now the water is bitter,
At home and working places
From children to adults
It is bitter, what shall we drink?

When Moses prayed, he was told by God
To dip a stick in the water to purify it
When he dipped the stick the water was purified
And the masses drank to the fill.

Men and women are quarrelling
Over small matters, telling each other
“I did not want someone like you!”
Because the water is bitter.

When you go to the offices seeking assistance
You find an angry officer
When you try to enter he tells you he is ‘busy’
Because the water is bitter.

Adultery is on the rise,
Murder, theft and robbery
As people seek bodily pleasures
Because the water is bitter

Just like Moses was told by God

*Aikie mūtī māi magīe cama,
Tweta Jesu nīegūtūthondeka
Kūrīa kūhitanu māi manyūike.*

To dip a rod so that water may be sweetened
If we call on Jesus he will treat us
So that the water can be drank.

The singer laments that the socio-economic situation has become so bad that people do not know what to do. They have problems everywhere—in their home and at their working places. Families are disintegrating because of situations that can be solved easily. To paraphrase Yeats, things are falling apart because the centre cannot hold and mere anarchy is upon the world! Civil servants are unwilling to serve the people and there is moral decadence, as people seek to find bodily fulfilment. The singer calls on his audience to call on Jesus in order to find salvation from this decay. That the singer finds the solution in religion is not surprising—divine intervention is key to the Christian belief system.

On the contrary, freedom fighters and political activists found the solution in a culturally situated belief system, memory of actual events and the people's collective efficacy. The action of 'dipping the rod' is significant: it points to non-passivity in the face of crisis. Like Moses the leaders had to 'do something' to liberate their people. Merging biblical tunes with community experiences, the Gikūyū political activists mobilised the masses to confront colonialism. The memory of biblical tunes and texts was superimposed on texts that dealt with immediate problems.

NGAI NIERUHAGIA IRIKANIRO

*Ngai nīeruhagia irikaniro,
Igatuika njerū kūrī riūa,
Na ndone kīrīma kana nduma,
Cia kūmūgīria agīūka kūhingia
Tondū Ngai etagwo mūtoria.*

*Nierire Kīnyatta na kīhoto,
Nīūkaingīha ta njata cia matuini,
Ndūriri ikarathimwo nīundu waku,
o nake Kīnyatta akīmūtīkia
Ngai akīhita na ūhoti wake.*

*Kīnyatta nī gītina gīa ūthamaki,
Nyūmba yake ndīkahorio tawa,
Na ndikaga gīthukī gīa gūcuria*

GOD REAFFIRMS HIS PROMISES

God reaffirms His promises,
making them brighter than the sun
unshadowed by the mountain and darkness,
that would block fulfilment
for God is called the winner.

He told Kenyatta in justice,
he would multiply like the stars in Heaven
Nations will be blessed because of Him,
and Kenyatta believed on Him
God swore by his victory.

Kenyatta is the source of leadership,
the lamp will not go out of his house
and there will always be lamp post

*Githondeketwo nĩ Ngai wa Gikũyũ
Nakĩo gĩtugĩ kũu nĩ ihoto.*

made by God of Gikũyũ
And the post is justice.

*Kĩnyatta egĩtĩtie he Mũrungu,
Tondũ nĩ gĩtugĩ gĩa ũthamaki
Nĩakirĩĩrie ruo rwa ngoro
ningĩ nĩ mũciri wa kihoto
Nĩ agacirĩra nyũmba ya Mũmbi.*

Kenyatta leans on Murungu,
because he is the pillar of leadership
He has withstood pain
and is a just advocate
He will defend the house of Mũmbi.

*Kĩnyatta arikanĩire na Gikũyũ,
akiuga nĩekũruta muoyo wake,
Nieguthĩĩ rūraya gweha ihoto,
cia gũcirĩra tũri ũyũ witũ.*

Kenyatta agreed with the Gikũyũ
he said he would sacrifice his life
he would go abroad to seek justice
to defend our land.

*Ngũria nitũkoima ũkombo-inĩ?
Nĩathire rūraya na agĩcoka,
na agĩũka na matuĩro ma ng'ondũ,
Na nyũmba irĩa oigire agooka gwaka,
hau Githũngũri kĩa Wairĩri
Nayo, ikarũgamia ũthamaki.*

Shall we move from slavery?
He went abroad and returned
and he came with food for the sheep
And the house which he said he would build
at Githũngũri, the place of Wairĩri
It will be the pillar of leadership

The reaffirmation and fulfilment of promises made created a sense of hope among the freedom fighters. God cannot forfeit them at their hour of need. The promise made about increasing the number of people who would be sufficiently instigated to undertake key roles in the liberation struggles would come to pass and Kenyatta's vision would be shared across nations. The images of the lamp and the post buttresses the significance of the song even further. It indicated that the struggle for justice and liberty would not fail because it is God-ordained. In the song, Kenyatta becomes a metaphor of the suffering leaders who have taken a position in defense of the people. By retracing Kenyatta's journey abroad and his return, the song shares an aspect of history. Kĩnyatta was so committed to his people that he returned to guide them to salvation, initially with the setting up of the Kenya Teachers College in Githunguri, where Kĩnyatta lived, and later with the administration of oaths of unity. This celebration of leaders is again captured in the song 'Ndiũĩ ũndũ ũngĩ' (I do not know anything else).

NDIŨĨ ŨNDŨ ŨNGĨ

I DO NOT KNOW ANYTHING ELSE

*Nũũ warĩ kũu gwa Kang'ethe,
mweri wena ikũmi na ithatĩ,
Akiona ciiko irĩa ciekirwo,
ciekirwo nĩ thũ cia rūrĩrĩ.*

Who was at Kang'ethe's
on 13 April
To see what was done
by the enemies of the tribe

Chorus

*Ndiũ undũ ũngĩ njui atĩrĩ, ngocage
Gĩkũyũ na Mũmbi, Ndiũ undũ ũngĩ
Njũ oũguo, ngocage atongoria a rũrĩrĩ.*

I do not know anything else except to praise
Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi I do not know anything else
Except to praise leaders of the tribe.

*Thigari ciarĩ ikumi na inya,
na athũngũ erĩ marĩ na thĩmbũ,
Thigari ciarĩ na mĩcinga ciokĩte gũthĩnia rũrĩrĩ.* There were 14 policemen
and two white men with clubs
The policemen had guns to trouble the tribe.

*Njũkĩ Kang'ethe akiuga atĩrĩ,
tigai kũũra nyũmba itũ,
Ti kuiya na ti kũũragana
rekei tũthirĩre hamwe.* Njuki Kang'ethe said,
don't run away my people
We have not stolen or murdered anyone
let us die together.

*Andũ arĩa oothe manyitirwo,
gũtirĩ wao wamakaga,
Moigaga narua na mĩtũki,
"tũtwarwo kũria tukwenderwo!"* All those who were arrested,
none was afraid
They would say quickly and without hesitation
"they have taken us wherever they want!"

*Gĩtonga kĩmwe gĩa Gĩkũyũ,
nĩ kĩageririe gwithaitĩra,
Gikiuga ti cai ngũkaga,
nĩ ngui ciakwa ngũnyitaga.* Gĩtonga, a rich Gĩkũyũ man
tried to salvage himself
He said, "I had not come for the oath,
I was retrieving my dogs."

*Manyitirwo andũ mĩrongo ĩna,
nacio thũ ciona no gũtheka,
Rĩria nyakerũ makainũka,
mũkangunda mũnjathimũre!* Forty people were arrested
and when the enemies saw they laughed
When the Whites leave,
you will sniff me and sneeze me out!

The Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) had been banned in 1940 and its leaders detained in Kapenguria. The leaders—Kang'ethe, Jessie Kariuki and G.K. Ndegwa—were released in 1944. However, even as the leaders were in detention, KCA continued its underground work—collecting funds for Kenyatta in England, supporting detainees and their families, and administering oaths of loyalty and unity (euphemistically referred to as tea-taking). The song shows that the people were prepared to die for the cause—they had not stolen or murdered anyone, but were seeking justice and fairness. It also captures the courage, astuteness, determination and unity in the struggle. There is a veiled threat to the loyalists and collaborators who worked with the White people to defeat the struggle for freedom.

The interspersing of direct and indirect speech adds value to the song; it highlights the honesty and sincerity in the depiction of the events at Kang'ethe's homestead. The contrast created between the poor and rich is also telling. The rich man's insincerity is displayed as he tries to isolate

himself from the oath-takers is further exemplified by the nature of the lie—his closeness to the dogs. This is supposed to show affinity with the White man, as well as being a sideward glance at his own role in society. The rich African shares the same interests as the settler and uncritically follows the latter. This reference, moreover, indicates the class nature of the freedom struggle. The laughter coming from the enemies of the community, suggests that there was cynicism and unbelief among certain members of the community that the colonialist would one day leave and people would be free. This cynicism is countered by the affirmation of that eventuality and the threat of revenge.

The image of the mountain is constantly invoked in political songs inspired by the Bible. In the song ‘*When Kĩmathi went up the mountain*’, the connection between freedom fighters and the Biblical prophet is again reincarnated. The colonial experience is shown to be of no value to the colonised—it is like a fruit that bears no fruit and only occupies a space better occupied by beneficial plants. The faith in a Super Being as well as Jomo and the other leaders kept the masses going.

The song also brings to the fore another dimension of the struggle. The narrative voice links oppression with racism. The insensitivity and inhumanity of colonialism is exacerbated by its racial aspects. The narrator does not regret his race; rather, he points to the racial basis of imperialism.

RĪRĪA KĪMATHI WITŪ AMBATIRE

Rĩrĩa Kĩmathi witũ ambatire,
kĩrĩma-inĩ arĩ wikĩ,
Nĩetirie hinya na ũmĩrĩru
wa kũhoota nyakerũ.
Tũkũrĩa tondũ turi andũ airũ,
na tũtĩri nyakerũ,
na tũtĩri a kĩrathimo kĩa,
Ngai witũ arĩ mbere.

Nĩoigire “makinya makwa mothe,
maria nĩ ndagereire,
Nonginya na inyuĩ mũkagera mo,
na mũnyũire ikombe icio”.
Mũtikamakio nĩ kũnyarirwo,
kana gũtũarwo ciugu,
Ona gũtũnywo, kana kũragwo,
Ngai witũ arĩ mbere.

WHEN KĪMATHI WENT UP

When our Kĩmathi went
up the mountain alone
He asked for energy and perseverance
to defeat the White man
We cry because we are Black people
and we are not Whites
and we are not of their heritage,
our God is ahead of us.

He said “All my footsteps,
where I passed
You all will pass there
and drink from those cups.”
You should not be worried by
the harassment or detentions
Or being robbed, or killed,
our God is ahead of us.

*Tūkūhoya Ngai atwītīkīrie,
nyakerū acoke kwao,
Tondū mūti ūtarī na maciario,
ndūhandagwo mūgūnda.*

*Ngoro ciitu itarī iranyarirwo,
Jomo ndagatūtiga,
Tondū onake ndatiganīirio
nī Ngai Kapengūria.*

We pray that God allows that
the White man goes back to his home
Because a tree that has no benefit
is not planted in the garden.

So long as our hearts are strong,
Jomo will not desert us
Because he has not been deserted
by God in Kapenguria.

The mountain as a source of energy, power and comfort reminds us of Moses on the mountain. It also points to the spiritual dimensions of the freedom struggle. The struggle could not fail because it was blessed by a God who understood the plight of the Kenyan people. The suffering of Jesus Christ at crucifixion is shown as an important sacrifice worth emulating. Thus, the masses are encouraged to withstand the pain and deprivation of freedoms wrought by the colonial onslaught.

The rewriting of Christianity witnessed in Central Kenya was by no means unique or isolated. For instance, the Black Caribbean diaspora, notably the Caribbean Islands, had embraced the concept of Ethiopia as a metaphor for continental Africa. Ethiopia was, after all, well-cited in the Bible, especially with reference to Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The political consequences of the defeat of the Italians in 1896 at Adowa by Emperor Menelik strengthened the image of Ethiopia as representative of the invincibility and resilience of the African continent. Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican born leader, travelled widely in the 1920s and 1930s urging the setting up of independent black churches as a tool for emancipation and liberation. He became a politico-religious icon for the Rastafarian movement. The Rastafarians saw the contradictions in Christianity and sought to address them by crafting a spirituality, philosophy and belief system based on Africa. They viewed biblical episodes through the eyes of Africa, just as the Black Muslims in the United States interpreted the Quran with African-American eyes (Clarke, 1990: xxi).

The rewriting of biblical texts within the Rasta movement is best captured through an examination of the songs by Bob Marley to which I briefly turn. Bob Marley's songs were inspired by a wide range of resistance movements in Africa such as the Nyabingi cult in Central Africa; the Ashanti wars in Ghana; and the Mau Mau liberation struggle among others. Bob Marley, in his songs, brought to the fore

the spirit of togetherness, solidarity and resolve encapsulated in these resistance efforts. His songs can be read as intertextual renderings and re-statements of Christian images grounded in African experiences. In celebrating the Nyabinghi movement, Bob Marley sings:

*... it gives great joy to see such sweet togetherness
everyone doing, and they doing their best
it remind I of the days in Jericho
when we trodding down Jericho walls
these are the days when we'd trod thru Babylon
we keep on trodding until Babylon falls;
sing your songs, yeah jump, jump, jump Nyabinghi...*

(Jump Nyabinghi; Confrontation)

We are presented with images of unity, commitment, determination, focus of mind and motivated action. The singer uses biblical allusion to emphasise the determination and unity of purpose of people seeking to break the chains of bondage. The inter-textualisation of the images of Israelites breaking down the walls of Jericho is a statement on the liberal imperative sanctioned through religious books. This imperative is again captured in 'Rastaman Live Up' (Confrontation).

*David slew Goliath with a sling and a stone
Samson slew the Philistines with a donkey jawbone
Saw it in the beginning
So shall it be in this Iwa (time)
And they falling in confusion
Well a just a step from Babel tower
Rastaman live up, Congoman don't give up.*

David brought down Goliath (the giant) with a sling and stone, while Samson defeated the Philistines with a donkey jawbone. Might is inconsequential in the face of justice. The story of David and Goliath as well as that of the dreadlocked Samson and the Philistines is reworked in order to make a political statement in song—the powerful can be overcome through justice, pursuit of what is right, sheer determination and singleness of purpose. The direct reference to 'Congoman' marks Africa as the intended audience. The narrator urges Africa not to give up even when faced with a powerful enemy.

The theme of redemption is key to Bob Marley's songs and his reggae

lyrics exemplify the twin function of artistic productions from the South. Songs are a tool for the release of emotions through entertainment as well as a space to nurture the ability of individuals and communities to know themselves better. For Bob Marley, that knowledge is not without a historical context.

In the *Buffalo Soldier (Confrontation)* Bob Marley celebrates the maroon heritage as part of the culture of resistance against domination. The maroons were free Africans and freed or run-away slaves but who were perpetually hunted. Attempts to wipe them out did not succeed and they were able to regroup and build independent communities and create war heroes such as Toussaint L'Overture of Haiti. *Buffalo Soldier* is a tribute to the maroons.

*When I analyse the stench
To me it makes a lot of sense
How the dreadlocks Rasta was the
Buffalo soldier...*

*If you know your history
Then you would know where you're coming from
Then you wouldn't have to ask me
Who the heck do I think I am?*

*I'm just a Buffalo soldier
In the heart of America
Stolen from Africa, brought to America
Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival
Trodding thru' San Juan in the arm of America
Trodding thru' Jamaica, the Buffalo soldier...
Buffalo soldier, win the war for America...*

Due to poverty, displacement and deprivations, the Rastafarians in Jamaica were haggard and dirty. Nevertheless, they have a history, Marley affirms. After a critical analysis of African history, the singer reaches the conclusion that Rastaman—a symbol of cultural and political resistance—was the 'buffalo soldier' stolen from Africa. The self-consciousness in the African diaspora is, for the singer, a consequence of the search for self-realisation and the resistance to alien ideas and cultures. The resilience of the African people is powerfully captured through the image of the strong buffalo that fought to redeem itself.

Bob Marley cared deeply about freedom and equality. He inspired

freedom fighters in Southern Africa and was a special guest at the Zimbabwe Independence Celebrations. In his song *One Love* he cautions humanity about an impending catastrophe (Armageddon) against which all must organise and strategise. That is what it would take for everything to be resolved.

*One love, one love
Let's get together and feel alright
Hear the children crying
Hear the children crying, saying
Give thanks and praise to the Lord
And I will feel alright.*

*Let them all pass all their dirty remarks (one love)
There is one question I'd really like to ask (one soul)
Is there a place for them hopeless sinners
Who has hurt all mankind
Just to accept their unbelief?*

*One love, one heart
Let's get together and feel alright
As it was in the beginning – one love
So shall it be in the end – one heart
(Alright) Give thanks and praise to the Lord
And I will feel alright
Let's get together and feel alright*

*Let's get together to fight this only Armageddon (one love)
So when the man come there will be no doom (one soul)
Have pity on those whose chances grow thinner
There ain't no hiding place
From the Father of Creation?*

*One love, one love
Let's get together and feel alright
I'm pleading to mankind
One love, one heart
Give thanks and praise to the Lord
And I will feel alright
Let's get together and feel alright...*

('One Love': Exodus)

Bob Marley was inspired by religious texts and depended heavily on verses from the Bible. He rewrote them to inject political and social interpretations. In '*One Love*', he pleads to mankind to love each other so that children who are deprived of basic rights and freedom can find peace and fulfilment. Phrases such as "*Give thanks and praise to the*

Lord"; and "*As it was in the beginning...so shall it be in the end...*" are derived from the scriptures, as is the title of the album, '*Exodus*.'

Conclusion

Although initial Christian songs sought to create a hegemonic relation between the colonisers and subject peoples, the texts were later translated and recorded to speak to the critical political, economic and social issues of the day. Christian songs were made relevant to the here and now, contextualised and sometimes inverted to address immediate social concerns. Peterson (2004: 201) makes reference to situations in which students erased the name Jesus Christ in church hymn books and pencilled in the name Jomo Kenyatta. Forest fighters set 'Lamentations 5' to song. Historical figures—Waiyaki, Kenyatta, Koinange, Oneko and others—were presented in songs as archetypes of committed leaders, just as Moses is presented in the Bible as the redeemer of the Jews from oppression perpetuated in Egypt. Multiple meanings drawn from Western religious texts were extended, translated, deconstructed and reconstructed to deal with politics in Africa.

In the Caribbean Islands, the Rastafarian movement was inspired by the Christian belief system, interpreted through an African lens. The songs from the proponents of the movement are political and redeeming in their thrust. The tone suggests an urgency in dealing with inequalities.

If the Christian texts had set out to depoliticise Africans in order to perpetuate a hegemonic normalcy of unequal relations, they did not achieve that end. Instead, they became spaces for a questioning of spirituality within the context of exploitation and oppression. A new meaning—situated in the here and now—was integrated into songs that hitherto were more concerned with an afterlife imagined to be happier, tolerant and fair. This reversal of the vision and role of religion paved the way for a more liberative interpretation vital in the pursuit of democracy, good governance, public participation and accountability in the contemporary world.

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L'intellectuel populaire et l'imaginaire politique : Le cas de Joseph Kamaru

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For four decades, Joseph Kamaru has been the best known Gikūyū *Benga* singer. This article examines about ten cassettes that the artiste dedicated to pre-electoral analyses since the return of multipartyism. Indeed, Kamaru created a genre of unique narrative that he perfected in his highly popular '*Message to the Youth*', vol. 1, which he used in several other musical compositions on the last three multiparty elections of 1992, 1997 and 2002. It comprises a sermon read on a base of religious music and often interrupted by singing.

In this compilation produced over a period of about ten years, Hervé Maupeu finds an opportunity to define the political thought of a popular intellectual, in the framework of the rebirth of Gikūyū nationalism. First of all, he tries to clarify the status of Kamaru. Of what and for whom does he speak? The singer presents himself as a Gikūyū Christian prophet, which leads him to define himself in relation to other types of prophetic figures who thrive in a Gikūyū political culture of prophets. He is also led to explain his social position when he delivers his political commentaries.

Secondly, Hervé Maupeu presents the political philosophy that specifically belongs to Kamaru. His approach is guided by a problem statement: since the 1980s, historians and anthropologists proved the existence of a Gikūyū identity matrix that John Lonsdale refers to as 'the Kikuyu moral economy'. According to certain researchers (Y. Droz, G. Wachege), the majority of inhabitants in Central Province continue to analyse contemporary events from this conceptual matrix despite the

obvious intervening social changes from the inception of the model, particularly by Jomo Kenyatta and his colleagues from the Kikuyu Central Association. Does Kamaru participate in this discussion on identity or does he make it evolve? In his paper, Maupeu responds to this question by presenting the social change theory expressed by Kamaru, his analysis of elections as a popular mode of political action and his criteria on what makes a good political leader.

Maupeu concludes his chapter by discussing the relationships that Kamaru, an expert on oral forms, maintained with Gikūyū experts of the written word. This leads Maupeu to consider Kamaru as a model case of the 'popular intellectual' (a modern version of what the historian S. Feierman refers to as the 'peasant intellectual') who, in Nairobi, became a central actor of 'bar politics'.

Introduction

Au début des années 90, J. Copans (1990 : chap.7) appelait de ses vœux une histoire sociale des intellectuels africains. Il argumentait essentiellement à partir des analyses menées par les collègues est-africains (et en particulier Tanzaniens). Or, depuis la fin des années 80, ce débat sur les fonctions politiques des intellectuels, leur marginalisation par l'appareil d'État ou leur place dans la société civile renaissante s'est essoufflé. Dans l'étude des intellectuels, la focale s'est déplacée de la science politique vers l'histoire et de l'analyse des universitaires comme acteurs critiques et idéologiques vers celle des agents étatiques et religieux comme producteurs d'identités.

En effet, les années 90 correspondent à l'apogée de l'école constructionniste de l'ethnie. La vision essentialiste des tribus (*tribes*) est remplacée par une approche historique des ethnies expliquant qu'elles sont souvent des inventions récentes des ingénieurs sociaux de l'impérialisme colonial. Cette création identitaire serait largement le produit de la politique britannique de diviser pour régner. Dans le cadre est-africain, B. Ogot (2000) offre la présentation la plus aboutie de cette tendance de l'historiographie quand il étudie la stratégie frontalière de l'administration britannique au Kenya. Le pouvoir colonial aurait rassemblé des groupes proches, chacun doté d'une unité administrative

(la « *Location* ») pour forger des ethnies elles-mêmes enfermées dans chaque district. Afin de mettre fin à la fluidité des identités pré-coloniales, les déplacements de population sont étroitement régulés par le jeu des *Kipande* (cartes d'identité indiquant chaque migration qui doit être autorisée par un employeur ou une autorité administrative). Dans chaque province, une ethnie dominante est positionnée : les Kikuyu dans la Province Centrale, les Luo dans la province de Nyanza. Afin de contrebalancer, les potentialités hégémoniques de ces deux groupes, d'autres grosses ethnies sont fédérées à partir de communautés hétéroclites : cela donne les Luyhas et les Kalenjins. Outre les DCs (*District Commissioners*) et les DOs (*District Officers*), une autre catégorie sociale est intégrée parmi ces artisans de la création ethnique : les missionnaires chrétiens. À eux d'homogénéiser la langue ethnique à partir des différents dialectes de leur zone d'influence. Ce processus aurait été essentiellement mené à partir des traductions de la Bible. C'est alors que s'amorcerait la prise en charge par certaines catégories d'autochtones et notamment les premiers convertis qui s'approprient alors les procédures de constitution des identités nouvelles.

À l'instar de l'un des fondateurs de l'école constructionniste, F. Barth, l'ethnicité est principalement perçue comme le produit des perceptions que des acteurs se font de leurs intérêts politiques. En ce sens, elle serait la création exclusive d'une grande variété d'intermédiaires culturels. Les recherches actuelles sur l'ethnie s'efforcent d'approfondir notre connaissance du champ concurrentiel de ces intermédiaires culturels qui seraient pour l'essentiel des gens de l'écrit. À cet égard, les historiens restent encore tributaires de leurs sources souvent imprimées. Ainsi, dans le cas du Kenya, des avancées ont été faites dans la connaissance des courants de pensée de ces intellectuels grâce à l'étude des publications en langues locales (Muoria, 1994). Également, une anthropologie de l'écrit nous a aidé à mieux comprendre les usages variés de l'écrit dans les processus politiques kikuyu (Peterson, 2004). Ainsi, les historiens ont tendance à voir la paternité des ethnies contemporaines dans les seuls alphabétisés. Cela conduit certains spécialistes à poser des questions dérangeantes : « *and how do erudite discussions and arguments about 'tribes' become translated into popular discourses and action, beyond the small circle of literate culture brokers ?* » (Willis, 2001 : 10). Cela amène J. Willis à mettre l'accent sur l'importance de ce qu'il appelle des micro-processus :

in daily life, people approach the creation of tribes through structures which are created by culture, in situations of dispute which arise out of the minutiae of life. It is through the 'micro-processes' of daily life –constant, ubiquitous discussions over rights and status which make reference to ethnic categories– that identity, including ethnic identity, has real force: the question then is how far ethnic identity can be remade through these processes. The possibilities and limits of these micro-processes are very much to do with people's understanding of their own position in society and their understanding of the way society is structured- with culture, indeed.

C'est à ce niveau qu'il convient probablement de revaloriser le rôle d'« intellectuels populaires » qui ne participent pas des élites qui ont forgé les premières versions des nationalismes ethniques et qui fonctionnent sur le mode oral et non pas au niveau de l'écrit. En effet, l'étude des ethnicités modernes se concentre sur le discours des bénéficiaires de la nouvelle stratification sociale qu'ils tentent de faire accepter par les idéologies du nationalisme ethnique et kenyan. Or, des historiens comme J. Lonsdale ou D. Peterson ont montré que ces entreprises idéologiques sont discutées, sinon contestées. Cette nouvelle hégémonie est relativisée ou négociée par les catégories sociales dominées et les africanistes ont tendance jusqu'à présent à analyser leurs actions en termes de résistance (J.C. Scott). Ils se livrent à une sociologie des mobilisations qui délaisse les discours alors que les dominés détiennent en leur sein des producteurs de discours qui ont cristallisé une conscience discursive populaire à travers des modes d'énunciation essentiellement oraux et qui participent des micro-processus envisagés par Willis. Ce fut l'objet notamment de l'étude magistrale de S. Feierman (1990) qui reconstitue l'historicité de ceux qu'il appelle les « *peasant intellectuals* » de ses collines du Nord-Est de la Tanzanie.

Bien sûr, ces intellectuels de l'oral, qui s'expriment exclusivement en langue ethnique continuent de prospérer et leur rôle contemporain doit être examiné au regard de la situation de démocratisation laborieuse que l'on connaît en Afrique de l'Est. Ainsi, nous nous intéresserons à Joseph Kamaru. Depuis trente ans, ce chanteur de Benga¹ incarne l'esprit

¹ Les Kenyans associent souvent le Benga à la musique populaire Luo apparue à la fin des années 60. Néanmoins, ce style musical qui se caractérise par certains instruments (le plus souvent électrifiés) et une forme particulière d'orchestration, se retrouve, avec des particularismes, dans toutes les régions du pays. Sur le sujet, 'Benga : the beat of East Africa', *Daily Nation*, 15 March, 2004, p. 13; G. BARZ, *Music in East Africa. Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004).

kikuyu. Bien sûr, Ngugi wa Thiong'o jouit d'une aura internationale que personne ne lui dispute. De nombreux Kikuyu sont prêts à reconnaître que les récits de Gakaara wa Wanjau² témoignaient avec talent des valeurs de leur ethnie. Les grands capitalistes, les politiciens et les bureaucrates de haut vol nés dans la Province Centrale sont nombreux mais aucun n'est perçu comme un symbole kikuyu. Par contre, Kamaru représente à lui seul une quintessence de l'identité kikuyu post-coloniale et l'une des principales voix contemporaines du nationalisme kikuyu.

Des analystes de son œuvre comme Gicingiri Ndigirigi (1994) estiment qu'il a construit sa notoriété sur des chansons politiques. Il est vrai que sa chanson Aromaka³ (« Let him be traumatized ») écrite peu après l'assassinat de Tom Mboya en 1969 lui a valu une grande popularité chez les Kikuyu et une réputation de tribaliste parmi les autres Kenyans. En effet, ce morceau menace de malédiction toute personne se refusant à participer à la campagne de serment que Jomo Kenyatta a organisé dans la région du Mont Kenya contre une supposée menace Luo. À la suite d'une levée de bouclier des églises, le Père de la Nation a interrompu ces cérémonies qui sentaient trop le soufre Mau Mau. En 1974, Kamaru a trouvé les mots justes pour exprimer l'indignation des Kikuyu face au meurtre du politicien populiste, J.M. Kariuki⁴. Pour la seconde fois de sa carrière, cette chanson a été interdite sur les ondes de la radio étatique, la VOK. Depuis, aucun événement marquant de la nation n'a échappé à ses commentaires : le décès de Jomo Kenyatta, la tentative de coup d'État de 1982, l'assassinat de R. Ouko... et bien sûr, les élections générales.

Depuis le retour du multipartisme au début des années 90, Kamaru consacre des cassettes entières à ses analyses pré-électorales. Il a ainsi créé un genre de narration unique qu'il a mis au point dans « *Message to the Youth* », vol. 1 et qu'il a utilisé dans plusieurs autres opus traitant des trois derniers scrutins multipartisans de 1992, 1997 et 2002. Il s'agit d'un

² C'est probablement l'auteur en langue kikuyu le plus lu. Il publiait dans sa très artisanale maison d'édition de courts récits traitant de tous les problèmes sociaux et moraux que le peuple affronte dans sa vie quotidienne. Il a joué un rôle important dans les efforts de standardisation de la langue. Enfin, ses mémoires de l'époque Mau Mau traduits du kikuyu à l'anglais ont rencontré un franc succès d'édition. Il est décédé dans les années 90. Sur son œuvre, voir, Pugliese, 1994.

³ Chanson rééditée dans sa cassette *Urathi wa Kamaru* (« Prophéties de Kamaru ») (CS – 177), vol. 1, Side B, n° 5.

⁴ Ce morceau est réédité dans la même cassette rassemblant les chansons patriotiques de Kamaru (Side B, n° 2).

prêche lu sur un fond musical de type religieux et parfois interrompu par des chansons. Le texte est rédigé dans une langue recherchée, bien sûr parsemée de proverbes et de paraboles. Kamaru a la réputation d'utiliser d'une langue d'un grand classicisme (« *clean kikuyu* », disent certains) et cela s'avère particulièrement vrai dans ses narrations électorales. Pour autant, il n'écrit pas de manière fade. Le sermon plus que la chanson lui permet de multiplier les registres : humour, vulgarité, incantation, malédiction, interpellation... Bref, il s'écoute autant pour le style que pour le contenu du message sans parler de la qualité des chansons qui permettent de reposer l'attention et de souffler avant de passer à une autre tirade.

Nous voyons dans ce corpus d'une dizaine de cassettes éditées sur une dizaine d'années l'occasion de cerner la pensée politique d'un intellectuel populaire, cela dans le cadre de la renaissance du nationalisme kikuyu. Deux questions principales guident notre recherche. Tout d'abord, quel est son statut ? En tant que quoi et au nom de qui, parle-t-il ? Comment se situe-t-il dans le champ intellectuel kikuyu et kenyan ? Mais il est difficile d'appréhender son rôle social sans examiner le contenu de ses discours. Depuis les années 80, des historiens (J. Lonsdale, D. Peterson), des philosophes (G. Wanjohi) et des politistes (B. Berman) ont mis en évidence l'existence d'une matrice identitaire kikuyu que Lonsdale appelle « *l'économie morale kikuyu* ». De l'avis de certains anthropologues (Y. Droz, G. Wachege), la majorité des habitants de la Province Centrale continuent d'analyser les événements contemporains à partir de cette matrice conceptuelle en dépit des évidents changements sociaux intervenus depuis que ce modèle semble avoir été élaboré, en particulier par Jomo Kenyatta et ses collègues de la *Kikuyu Central Association*. Est-ce que Kamaru participe de la résilience de ce discours identitaire ou le fait-il évoluer ?

Kamaru, un prophète kikuyu chrétien

Dans l'ensemble de ses cassettes sur les élections, le discours de Kamaru sur sa position sociale est extrêmement cohérent. Ce travail de clarification immédiat était particulièrement nécessaire dans le contexte

kikuyu qui est une culture politique à prophètes. L'histoire coloniale et post-coloniale de cette communauté est ponctuée de figures de grands prophètes dont les discours sont constamment réinterprétés même après leur mort afin de faire évoluer les théories politiques de la région (Lonsdale, 1995). De plus, la catégorie sociale des prophètes est loin d'être homogène. Ainsi, D.M. Anderson et D.H. Johnson (1995 : 14) remarquent la grande variété des idiomes prophétiques en Afrique de l'Est. C'est également vrai à l'intérieur de la communauté kikuyu. Et cela, y compris de nos jours, car les années 90 ont donné lieu à une grande efflorescence de discours prophétiques kikuyu (Maupeu, 2003).

Dans *God's Message to the Nation* (1992)⁵, Kamaru se présente comme un « *serviteur de Dieu* », choisi par lui pour ses mérites. Il se veut primordialement comme un « *messenger élu* ». Ainsi, il reprend ce terme dans toutes les cassettes subséquentes. Il se distingue des autres prophètes kikuyu actuels du fait de son caractère chrétien. En effet, ses concurrents contemporains participent tous de la dynamique néo-traditionnelle qui rencontre un grand succès notamment à travers la secte prophétique, Mungiki (Wamue, 2001 ; Maupeu, 2002a-, b- ; 2003) qui, paradoxalement trouve une grande partie de ses sources doctrinales dans les vieilles cassettes de Kamaru des années 70 et 80 où il expliquait les traditions kikuyu et re-popularisait les chansons Mau Mau.

Les anthropologues ont l'habitude de distinguer le prophète du divin qui est visité par des rêves, du voyant qui révèle l'inconnu et du *spirit medium* qui communique avec les morts (Anderson et Douglas, 1995). Dans la typologie kikuyu, la différenciation se fait à un autre niveau. Ainsi, Kamaru se dit travaillé par des rêves sans être pour autant un divin. De plus, il n'accepte pas d'être classé dans la même catégorie que Marie Akatsa, la grande prophétesse de la périphérie de Nairobi qui avait des apparitions de la Vierge avant d'être portée en 1992 au Parlement grâce à la vague Matiba (le plus populaire des leaders politiques kikuyu du début des années 90). Il tient surtout à se distinguer des *medicine men*, non parce qu'ils traitent l'individu alors qu'il s'occupe du collectif mais car il ne met pas en œuvre lui-même ses médicaments même s'il est amené, comme nous le verrons, à faire des diagnostics sur l'état de la société. Pour autant, les deux fonctions sont proches et dans *Message*

⁵ J'ignore si cette cassette fut éditée avant les trois opus de *Message to the Youth*, également diffusés à partir de 1992.

to the Youth, vol. 3, Kamaru demande à procéder à des cérémonies de purification de la nation (kikuyu) du fait qu'elle est atteinte par un sort.

Bien sûr, en tant que prophète, il se heurte à l'inévitable question : est-il un vrai prophète ? Dans *Message to the Youth*, vol. 1, Face A, il sait qu'il ne lui suffit pas d'affirmer « *comme vous le savez, un ancien comme moi peut prédire ce qu'il adviendra dans les trente années à venir* ». De son aveu même, il se heurte au scepticisme de l'élite : « *je leur ai dit de me donner une offrande afin que je leur indique où ils se sont perdu en chemin. Mais ils m'ont traité de mendiant et moi, Kamaru, je me suis retiré* ». Pour prouver son statut, ses prédictions doivent s'être avérées justes et dans cette même cassette, il cherche à démontrer qu'il a subi le test avec succès : sa chanson sur l'assassinat de J.M. Kariuki avait annoncé que le coupable serait puni et Jomo Kenyatta est mort peu après ; une autre de ses chansons aurait annoncé la tentative de coup d'État de 1982 ; de même, il aurait prédit la violence des révoltes de Saba Saba au début des années 90. Bien sûr, les analystes de l'œuvre de Kamaru n'ont pas manqué de se poser la question de ses dons et leur point de vue est intéressant dans la mesure où cela les oblige à définir ce qu'ils entendent par « prophète ». Ainsi, Ndīgīrīgī (1994) estime qu'

il est difficile de le voir comme un prophète. Un prophète ne se comporte pas comme s'il avait peur. Il ne mendie pas pour un pardon. Le prophète dit ce en quoi il croit et la façon dont il voit les choses et il prédit le futur avant que les gens soient au courant. Le prophète se présente devant le peuple pour lui expliquer les trous dans le chemin qu'ils doivent éviter... Il ne plaide pas avec les gouvernants qui dirigent par la dictature ou avec les criminels même s'ils portent des couronnes en or de n'importe quel prix.

Cet auteur reproche clairement le bout de chemin que Kamaru a amorcé dans la KANU (le parti unique du Kenya de l'époque) de l'ère post-Kenyatta, à la fin des années 70. Ainsi, Kamaru a participé à des voyages officiels du Président Moi à l'étranger et il a fait partie du chœur des cyclophantes du régime pendant quelques années. Cette trahison est difficilement pardonnable parmi les contributeurs de la revue *Mũtiiri* (une publication en langue kikuyu dirigée par Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o) où l'article de Ndīgīrīgī est édité. Pour autant, cet auteur n'accuse pas Kamaru d'être un faux prophète. Il le perçoit plutôt comme un miroir de la vie sociale et comme un instituteur enseignant en particulier les traditions kikuyu et l'histoire Mau Mau et post-Mau Mau de cette

population. Ce serait la voix du peuple et un reflet fidèle de l'identité kikuyu post-coloniale.

Ndīgīrīgī ne parle pas du caractère chrétien de Kamaru qui prend de plus en plus d'importance au cours des années 90 mais il est évident que cet aspect heurte certains intellectuels kikuyu. Pour autant, dès 1992 (*Message to the Youth*, vol. 2), Kamaru insiste fortement sur ce point. Ainsi, il invite les membres du clergé à se joindre à ses homélies dans les bars afin de parler directement au peuple sur ses lieux de vie et de loisir. Dans *Message to the Nation* (1997), il explique qu'il est « sauvé » depuis 1993. En fait, il est de notoriété publique qu'il a fondé sa propre église, *Christ Campaigners Ministry* qui rencontre un succès certain tant à Nairobi, dans son siège de *River Road* que dans les campagnes lors des croisades qu'il organise. Ce mouvement est plus ou moins accepté par les principaux courants chrétiens du fait notamment de la bigamie bien connue de son leader. Ce christianisme revendiqué se traduit par le recours plus systématique à partir de 1997 au commentaire de passages de la Bible mis constamment en rapport avec des traditions kikuyu. En effet, Kamaru explique dans *Inooro Ria Ngai*, vol. 1 (2002) que la religion a été adultérée par les étrangers qui s'en sont servis comme instrument de colonialisme ou de néo-colonialisme. Il appartient à cette tendance de la théologie kenyane qui, à l'instar du Père Wachege, estime que la religion kikuyu partageait de nombreux traits communs avec le christianisme, en particulier de l'Ancien Testament. Les Kikuyu étaient chrétiens sans le savoir et avant même l'arrivée des missionnaires.

La nature chrétienne du prophétisme de Kamaru induit des processus particuliers. Dans *God's Message to the Nation* (1992), il se présente comme un « *analyste* » et il explique qu'il n'est pas le messager passif de la parole du Tout Puissant car Dieu utilise l'esprit et l'intelligence de son relais humain. Dans *Message to the Youth*, vol. 2, il développe cette idée en affirmant qu'il est « *un fouilleur (ou un 'dévoileur') de vérité* ». Dix ans plus tard, dans *Inooro ria Ngai*, vol. 1 et 2, il se caractérise, comme l'indique le titre de cet opus, comme la « *pierre à aiguiser de Dieu* » : « *la volonté de Dieu et celle des peuples du Kenya fonctionnent côte à côte (en parallèle) et laisse-les se combattre... si un pays manque de pierre à aiguiser de Dieu, il s'affûte avec les pierres de l'enfer* ». Apparemment, Kamaru estime que son rôle est d'ajuster les messages de Dieu afin qu'ils soient susceptibles d'atteindre les Kikuyu.

Les souffrances des hommes sont causées par leur ignorance et le prophète se doit donc de dispenser des connaissances. Il doit même « *tout dire* » (*Toboa*), selon l'expression lancinante qu'il reprend dans toutes ses cassettes. Sauf que le savoir est toujours dangereux comme il le rappelle quand il parle de Robert Ouko, le ministre des affaires étrangères assassiné en 1990 vraisemblablement par des membres du cercle proche du Président Moi. D.W. Cohen et E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo (2004) ont consacré un ouvrage aux commissions d'enquêtes qui se sont intéressées à ce meurtre. Ils l'ont appelé de façon révélatrice « *The Risks of Knowledge* ». Ces auteurs ne cherchent pas qui a tué le ministre. Ils travaillent sur les usages de la mémoire de Ouko tels que les différentes commissions les ont cristallisés. En effet, ces reconstitutions minutieuses des derniers moments du politicien créent « *un intervalle prophétique qui produit des possibilités critiques* » (Cohen et Atieno-Odhiambo, 2004 : 271). Or les homélies de Kamaru procèdent de la même démarche quand il analyse l'histoire kenyane, qu'il parle des traditions kikuyu ou qu'il commente l'action des grands hommes de la nation.

La religion prophétique comme cadre de compréhension du politique

S. Ellis et G. Ter Haar (2004 : 2) affirment « *we contend that it is largely through religious ideas that Africans think about the world today, and that religious ideas provide them with a means of becoming social and political actors. The study of religious thought therefore constitutes a privileged opportunity for observing political practice in Africa* ». Ces lignes auraient pu être écrites par Kamaru. On le sait les prophètes traitent à partir de leur présentation du futur du passé et du présent. Ainsi, les prédictions de Kamaru reposent primordialement sur une explication de la crise kikuyu actuelle.

Une pédagogie du changement

Les prophètes sont avant tout des acteurs qui se chargent de donner un sens à la modernité du moment. Leur charisme toujours provisoire

dépend notamment de la pertinence ressentie de leur interprétation des changements en cours.

Les politistes contemporains nous expliquent que l'État est une greffe occidentale qui a largement échoué. Ce serait une superstructure superficielle planant au dessus de la société. Or, tout au long de ses cassettes, Kamaru développe l'idée que le Kenya connaît une étatisation réelle mais insatisfaisante du fait d'une théorie de la souveraineté populaire rejetée par l'élite. Il procède à la façon du Min. Ouko que Cohen et Odhiambo (2004 : 270) nous décrivent : « *It is this naturalized and lived surface of the state that John Robert Ouko sought to domesticate and articulate in anticipation of a transfiguration of the Moi state into a future Kenyan nation* ». Sauf que Ouko opérait des hauteurs de l'État alors que Kamaru parle des hauteurs de la parole de Dieu.

Les analyses de Kamaru se situent à deux niveaux : il décrit la situation politique insatisfaisante dans laquelle les Kenyans vivent et il explique ce que devrait être le fonctionnement de l'organisation socio-politique. Ainsi, il montre un État capturé par une élite illégitime (on verra ultérieurement les caractères de cette illégitimité). Mais dans son ontologie politique, l'État ne doit pas exister en tant que tel. Il faut une continuité de l'économie domestique à la structure étatique qui ne serait qu'une conséquence de la division du travail. Ainsi, dans *God's Message to the Nation* (1992, Face B), il s'emploie à présenter la situation contemporaine du Kenya par une série d'emboîtement de crises : le riche exploite le pauvre ; l'employé est malhonnête avec son employeur ; les riches ont « mangé » le Kenya ; l'administration est corrompue ; sur les routes, les Kenyans sont des chauffards qui multiplient les incivilités ; la ville est un lieu de perdition ; le *Nairobi City Council* est complètement corrompu et incapable de remplir ses fonctions ; les hôpitaux n'ont plus de médicaments et les médecins se comportent comme de petits despotes ; le gouvernement est impuissant, les ministres étant trop occupés à piller le pays. Bref, le Kenya est « *un lieu que Dieu teste* ».

Ainsi, la nation kenyane ne peut s'accomplir du fait de l'égoïsme de chaque groupe et cela en dépit du fait que le « *Kenya appartient à tous* » (les peuples du Kenya) (*Message to the Youth*, vol. 3). Pour autant, il ne plaide pas pour une souveraineté populaire participative car selon lui, chacun doit se tenir à sa place. L'objectif de la société est

de permettre à chacun de s'accomplir honorablement. En effet, les institutions n'ont pas de sens autre que d'assurer l'honneur de chaque individu. Ainsi, la finalité de la démocratie est clairement d'assurer les moyens de la prospérité (conclusion de *Munyongoro* (1993), la cassette qu'il édite après la défaite des élections générales de 1992). Ainsi, quand il explique le pouvoir prêté aux politiques, il n'use jamais d'une théorie de la représentation qui privilégierait les institutions juridiquement définies. Il navigue plutôt entre une approche cryptique insistant sur la manipulation des politiques par une élite illégitime, ce qui lui permet de décrire la situation actuelle et un modèle de la gouvernance où les politiques ne sont qu'un acteur parmi d'autres qui gouvernent par contrat et qui serait la solution qu'il préconise.

La théologie du changement que Kamaru propose ne passe pas seulement par une analyse de l'étatisation de la société. Il présente surtout une théorie cyclique de l'évolution des sociétés humaines ancrée dans la tradition kikuyu mais contestataire du nationalisme de la première moitié du XX^e siècle. Lonsdale, le meilleur spécialiste de la pensée politique de Jomo Kenyatta et donc de la première génération du nationalisme kikuyu explique que l'élite politique kikuyu des années 20 et 30 a défendu devant les Britanniques une conception dynastique de la propriété foncière. Les leaders des *mbari* (sous-clan) détiendraient des droits héréditaires sur la terre qui s'apparenteraient à la conception occidentale de la propriété. Ils gomment ainsi l'ensemble des obligations que les responsables des *mbari* avaient à l'égard de leurs dépendants. Ces politiciens ont mis l'accent sur la dimension verticale de l'organisation sociale kikuyu (les sous-clans). Mais leur théorie fut contestée par d'autres groupes sociaux et en particulier par les Mau Mau qui ont souligné qu'il existait également une dimension horizontale de cette structuration sociale, celle des classes d'âge et des générations. Or, Kamaru reprend cette ligne de force horizontale quand il énonce sa théorie du temps social kikuyu. Selon lui, l'histoire fonctionne selon une logique de cycles temporels de durée variable.

Dans *Message to the Youth*, Kamaru estime que les élections de 1992 sont le nouvel *itwika* des Kikuyu. Dans le système générationnel pré-colonial, le pouvoir était transféré d'une génération à une autre tous les trente à quarante ans. Cela suivait généralement une période de crise que l'*itwika* effaçait en remettant les compteurs à zéro. C'est donc un

moment de régénération que Kamaru croit reconnaître dans le retour du multipartisme et le scrutin afférent.

À l'intérieur des grands cycles générationnels, Kamaru distingue des cycles courts de quatre à cinq ans. Il ne justifie pas leur existence mais on peut constater que ces périodes rapprochées font des élections le pivot de la vie politique. Ainsi, notre prophète diffuse une conception de l'histoire où tout a déjà été expérimenté. Il faut donc connaître l'histoire de son peuple afin d'exercer pleinement sa liberté individuelle de décision.

Cette théorie de la temporalité s'articule à un discours particulier sur la causalité.

Une théorie de la causalité

Les prophètes prospèrent particulièrement en temps de crise. Ils interprètent la crise ce qui permet à la communauté de persister dans son être. Les nationalismes également se développent et en l'occurrence ressurgissent en période de grand changement, quand il faut repenser l'unité de l'ethnie. Dans le cas des Kikuyu, la définition du nouveau contrat social passe par une compréhension de la dégénérescence qui les a frappé. Ainsi, une grande partie des cassettes de Kamaru est consacrée à l'explication du Purgatoire des Kikuyu.

En 1978, le Président Moi succède au fondateur de la nation, Jomo Kenyatta. Afin d'asseoir son système hégémonique, il s'emploie durant toutes les années 80 à débarrasser les sommets de l'État des leaders kikuyu. Les recrutements dans la fonction publique cessent de fonctionner au profit des Kikuyu. De même, l'accès aux prêts publics se fait pour eux plus difficile. Avec le retour du multipartisme, les élites gouvernantes usent des nettoyages ethniques qui affectent majoritairement des populations kikuyu.

Les narrations que Kamaru fait de ce Purgatoire reposent sur l'idée de la responsabilité des Kikuyu dans leurs malheurs. En fait, il cerne deux niveaux de responsabilité : celle du peuple et celle de la haute élite. Selon lui, le peuple souffre car il a abandonné le chemin de Dieu. Quand les Kikuyu étaient en phase avec Dieu, ils vivaient dans la prospérité.

À eux donc, d'user de leur liberté et de faire le bon choix. Ainsi, ils dépasseront le « *sort jeté par Jomo* (Kenyatta) ». Kamaru développe l'idée que Moi est arrivé au pouvoir de façon légitime, selon les vœux de Jomo. Mais le fondateur de la nation est une figure politique ambiguë, bénéfique à une époque (conquête de l'indépendance) et maléfique (à la fin de sa vie). Kamaru dans la digne filiation des Mau Mau se livre à un bilan sous bénéfice d'inventaire de l'œuvre de Kenya. Le *Mzee* (surnom de Kenya) aurait été perverti par le pouvoir et aurait jeté un sort sur son peuple.

Moi également est victime de ce sort qui en fait un « *Ogre* »⁶, un « *Diable* », un « *Satan diabolique* ». Ce type d'explication rejoint des rumeurs permanentes sur le fait que *State House* est hanté : ce serait la raison pour laquelle Moi n'aurait jamais résidé dans cette maison et que Kibaki est tombé gravement malade peu après son entrée en fonction⁷.

Ainsi, Kamaru construit sa vision de l'ordre socio-politique sur une série d'oppositions systématiques :

Dieu / Diable

Connaissance / Ignorance

Richesse morale / Richesse irresponsable

Altruisme / Égoïsme

Leader / Despote

À partir de ce code binaire, il énonce sa version du nouveau nationalisme kikuyu.

Kamaru et le renouveau du nationalisme kikuyu

La revitalisation du nationalisme kikuyu est la conséquence du purgatoire que cette communauté connaît dans les années 80. À ce titre, c'est d'abord une idéologie de combat et de lutte contre le régime du Président Moi. Pour autant, cette nouvelle identité politique ne repose

⁶ Sur Moi en tant qu'Ogre, voir Maupeu, 2004.

⁷ Kibaki s'est mal remis d'un accident de voiture intervenu durant sa campagne électorale. Mais peu après son arrivée au pouvoir, il a apparemment subi plusieurs crises cardiaques. Sur le thème de *State House* hanté, voir le roman de R. Njau, *The Sacred Seed* (Nairobi, Horizon Books, 2003).

pas exclusivement sur la haine des gouvernants de l'époque. Une grande partie des débats intérieurs à l'ethnie portent sur la politique de l'intime ou plus précisément sur la politique de l'unité domestique. Bien sûr, ces deux questions sont relativement liées : les discussions sur la définition de la famille, les droits et obligations de ses membres fixent le sens de la société souhaitée et permettent de fixer des critères sur les qualités des leaders. À l'évidence, le discours de Kamaru porte à ces deux niveaux.

Il est possible d'amorcer la présentation de la pensée nationaliste de Kamaru par une fausse bonne question : pour qui roule-t-il ? Dans les analyses africanistes, les intellectuels ne sont jamais présentés comme une catégorie sociale autonome du fait notamment de l'inexistence d'un champ intellectuel au sens bourdieusien du terme. Ce seraient toujours les cautions d'un groupe social particulier. De plus, les sciences sociales ont tendance à voir dans les nationalismes, une idéologie visant à légitimer la situation de nouvelles élites. Ainsi que l'explique J. Lonsdale (1987 : 335), « *tous les nationalismes ethniques furent des tentatives créatrices pour rendre morales les nouvelles inégalités sociales, pour rendre tolérable la formation de classe* ». Quelques pages plus loin, il précise sa pensée : « *le nationalisme kikuyu ressemble beaucoup à tous les autres. Il apparut à une époque de changement social rapide, alors que les hiérarchies étaient remises en question, que les images admises du passé et de l'avenir étaient subverties, et que des « hommes nouveaux » au statut incertain mais aux grandes ambitions commençaient à consolider leur autorité et à vouloir donner une respectabilité à leurs ambitions* » (Lonsdale, 1987 : 343). En l'occurrence, Lonsdale parle du nationalisme de Jomo Kenyatta et de la *Kikuyu Central Association* de l'entre-deux-guerres. Est-ce que le nationalisme kikuyu de la fin du XX^e siècle fonctionne au profit des mêmes groupes sociaux que celui de la première moitié du siècle ? Ou travaille-t-il dans le sens d'« hommes nouveaux » à la réussite récente ?

Un leader et pas un despote

Les cassettes électorales de Kamaru visent à promouvoir certaines personnes. Du moins, il s'emploie à définir les qualités d'un bon leader. Il le fait d'abord négativement comme on l'a vu dans ses portraits

du Président Moi en tant qu'Ogre ou Diable ou dans ses analyses de l'évolution du rôle de Jomo Kenyatta qui meurt en dictateur assassin. Mais ces figures historiques qui ont été à la tête de l'État sont exceptionnelles et des critères parfois particuliers s'imposent dans l'analyse de leur impact. Néanmoins, il existe des défauts qu'il faut traquer et qui dénotent un mauvais leadership quel que soit le niveau d'intervention du notable étudié.

Un leader est par définition riche mais sa prospérité ne devient socialement acceptable et ne lui ouvre la voie du leadership que si elle s'accompagne d'obligations et de responsabilités. L'accomplissement de soi passe par la réussite matérielle mais la richesse est dangereuse car elle dégénère facilement en égoïsme inacceptable du point de vue de la communauté. Il qualifie ces mauvais riches d'*eririri* (ceux qui ne pensent qu'à eux-mêmes ou qui remplissent leur poches), du terme communément employé à l'égard des Loyalistes de l'époque Mau Mau (Leakey, 1954 : 60). Dans *Message to the Youth*, vol. 1 (1992, Face A), l'argent immoral fait du riche un cannibale⁸, un être hybride « *auquel il pousse des seins de femmes* ». De plus, sa réussite le rend inaccessible au commun et peu disponible. Dans la Face B, Kamaru estime que les riches se constituent en groupe spécifique (par rapport au peuple) mais divisé (entre membres de l'élite) ce qui les empêche de remplir leur responsabilité au sein de la communauté. Or, l'unité des leaders kikuyu serait particulièrement nécessaire. À l'occasion des élections générales de 1992, il souligne les dangers du multipartisme qui divise le vote kikuyu. De même, en 2002, dans *Inoororia Ngai*, vol. 1 et 2, il implore Kibaki et Uhuru Kenyatta de s'entendre sur une candidature commune. Il souligne alors le danger que constitue un « *faux leader* ». Ainsi, il suggère qu'Uhuru Kenyatta n'est qu'une branche de l'arbre Moi et qu'il est nécessaire d'abattre l'arbre en entier. Uhuru ne peut être acceptable car il est « *ignorant* » en ce sens qu'il respecte fausement les traditions. Kamaru fait allusion au soutien qu'Uhuru a offert à la secte prophétique kikuyu, Mungiki (Maupeu, 2003). Les Kikuyu doivent comprendre que Dieu les teste et qu'il ne leur offre le pouvoir que s'ils acceptent de sacrifier un de leurs enfants. À travers un commentaire du Livre de Job où il se présente comme une réincarnation du prophète Daniel, il déclare la nécessité de crucifier un des deux leaders sur la croix kikuyu.

⁸ Cette idée est largement répandue en Afrique de l'Est. Ainsi Okoth Okombo, un écrivain luo a publié en 1995 une allégorie très populaire sur ce thème et significativement intitulée *The Cannibals* (Nairobi, Basic Books).

En résumé, quelles sont les qualités qui font un leader et non pas un despote ? Dans la conclusion de *Message to the Nation* (1997), Kamaru en cerne six :

« *il doit être une personne qui craint Dieu. Une personne qui prête serment sur Dieu et non pas sur une Bible invertie* ». Depuis les élections perdues de 1992, une rumeur prévalente chez les Kikuyu affirmait que le Président Moi tirait ses pouvoirs du fait que la Bible sur laquelle il avait prêté serment lors de l'entrée en fonction officielle était une bible rouge dédiée au culte satanique.

« *Deux : votre relation à Dieu doit être celle d'une pousse et de son tuteur... Votre relation à Dieu ne doit faire aucun doute pour le peuple comme pour Dieu* ». Le leader ne peut pas se présenter comme « sauvé » ainsi que le Président Moi le fait et agir différemment.

« *Numéro trois : vous devez posséder l'amour des êtres humains comme l'amour de Dieu. Vous devez souhaiter le développement du pays mais pas de vous débarrasser de Moi et de ses ethnies* ». La prospérité sans la vengeance.

« *Numéro quatre : vous en devez pas être une personne avec deux fins marquées* (au sens de caractère contradictoire). *Car Dieu n'aimerait pas une personne qui ne soit ni chaude ni froide. Il est donc préférable que vous soyez ou chaud ou froid... Dieu veut un président qui soit stable... Dieu ne veut pas d'un président qui soit indécis. Il veut quelqu'un qui recherche la justice* ». Apparemment, Kamaru ne souhaite pas un leader qui joue d'une faction contre une autre. Peut-être s'inquiète-t-il de la santé mentale du leader. En 1997, Kenneth Matiba, le candidat kikuyu qui avait recueilli le plus de voix lors des élections de 1992 multipliait les déclarations contradictoires et des rumeurs couraient sur sa santé mentale. On disait qu'il s'était mal remis de son pénible emprisonnement de la fin des années 80.

« *Numéro cinq : vous devez être le chef d'une famille stable. Une personne qui n'a pas d'handicaps. Une personne sans squelettes dans une armoire. Une personne qui entretient des relations suivies avec son village et son pays... quelqu'un sans tâche avant et après sa naissance. De caractère droit dans son village et dans la nation entière* ». Comme toujours les qualités du leader se jaugent dans la cité domestique et au niveau du village. Le nationalisme kikuyu reste une idéologie rurale.

« *Numéro six : vous devez être une personne courageuse. Courageuse, humainement et du point de vue de Dieu. Une personne qui peut sacrifier sa propre vie pour le peuple ou au nom de la nation. Et une personne qui ne pense pas seulement à son propre estomac* ». Il a les qualités d'un guerrier et la sagesse d'un ancien. Il doit également s'enrichir mais en pensant aux autres. Le pouvoir ne s'envisage pas sans l'enrichissement mais il faut que la prospérité soit altruiste.

Est-ce que ces critères dépeignent une élite précise que Kamaru cherche à promouvoir ? Les élections de 1997 et surtout de 2002 ont consacré en terroir kikuyu de nouveaux notables qui ont fait leur fortune en ville, souvent dans le sillon de la KANU et qui, la prospérité acquise, cherchent à se faire consacrer dans leur terroir. Ils quittent alors la KANU pour rejoindre le parti qui a le vent en poupe dans leur région. À Nyeri, ces leaders venus de la ville ont raflé en 2002 l'essentiel des postes de députés. Ils ont profité de la « guerre du café » des années 90 qui a opposé les riches propriétaires avec les petits paysans à cause de la fragmentation de toutes les coopératives de la zone kikuyu. Ainsi, les paysans ont renvoyé dans leur foyer l'ensemble des députés sortants à l'exception de Mwai Kibaki. Apparemment, Kibaki contrôle toujours son fief de Nyeri puisque tous les parlementaires du district appartiennent à son parti mais ses nouveaux venus ne participent plus du système clientéliste et identitaire de Kibaki qui reposait sur les coopératives du café (Maupeu, Charlery de la Masselière, Mbataru, 2004). Or Kamaru ne soutient pas cette nouvelle élite avec laquelle il n'a aucun lien. Même dans son terroir, il n'a pas participé à la campagne électorale d'aucun candidat. Dans ses interviews, il affirme qu'il défend des principes et non des hommes. Il n'est probablement pas l'instrument au service d'intérêts particuliers. Il énonce plutôt des discours à l'intérieur desquels certains thèmes sont définies et débattus. Et bien sûr, comme tous les Kikuyu, il analyse la politique à travers l'idiome de la tradition, la discussion des coutumes permettant de cerner les enjeux contemporains qui constituent l'unité communautaire. Cent ans auparavant, il aurait discuté des rituels pré-coloniaux ; il y a cinquante ans, il aurait traité des églises indépendantes mais à la fin du XX^e siècle, il réfléchit sur le principal rituel social de son époque, les élections.

Les élections comme mode populaire d'action politique

L'ordre social tels que le nationalisme de Kamaru l'envisage est inégalitaire. Mais il existe une interdépendance entre les différents groupes de la société. Comme il l'explique dans *Message to the Youth*, vol. 3 (1992), « *leaders, vous êtes les poutres et le peuple est la corde qui relie ces mâts afin que nous puissions construire une maison* ». Dans cette organisation sociale, l'élection constitue le moment où le peuple entérine

une hiérarchie sociale. C'est également l'occasion de promouvoir de nouvelles élites. Ainsi, ses trois cassettes de *Message to the Youth* (1992) plaident pour l'arrivée au Parlement de davantage de jeunes et de femmes. Il pousse même la provocation jusqu'à demander que la moitié des députés soient des jeunes. Selon lui, les élections générales de 1992 doivent enfin réaliser le projet énoncé par la crise Mau Mau. La démocratisation passe par un changement de génération au pouvoir.

Pour autant, ses velléités de jeunisme ne durent que le temps de la première élection multipartisane. Dix ans plus tard, la nouvelle idéologie en faveur de la « *génération dotcom* ⁹ » lui apparaît comme un leurre manipulé par le Président Moi qui souhaite rester au pouvoir à travers son poulain, le très jeune et inexpérimenté Uhuru Kenyatta. De fait, les jeunes sont avant tout perçus comme des êtres influençables, toujours à la merci des leaders illégitimes. C'est ce qu'il appelle « *la trahison des aînés* ». Ainsi, dans toutes ses cassettes, Kamaru dénonce la pratique de l'achat de vote. Il recommande aux jeunes d'accepter les sommes proposées mais de voter en conscience.

À l'évidence, les élections sont choses sérieuses. C'est le temps où les catégories sociales négocient leurs relations sociales. Dans l'idiome de Kamaru, les élections constituent l'opportunité de rapprocher l'ordre social humain de l'organisation voulue par Dieu. Le scrutin rapproche l'homme de Dieu ou du Diable. En ce sens, c'est un moment particulièrement dangereux. D'autant que les leaders illégitimes profitent de ces occasions pour abuser de leur pouvoir en organisant des violences. Ainsi, Kamaru fait partie des rares leaders kikuyu qui ait abondamment commenté les nettoyages ethniques de la Rift Valley. *Message to the Youth*, vol. 2 et 3 mais également *Munyongoro* (1993) développent une philosophie de la mobilisation politique pacifique au motif que la violence gêne l'expression de la volonté divine. Paradoxalement, sa démonstration se fonde sur des commentaires de la guerre Mau Mau où il examine l'intérêt du recours politique à la violence et la responsabilité

⁹ En 2002, le Président Moi renonce à se représenter aux élections présidentielles mais il a verrouillé le contrôle de son parti, la KANU (*Kenya African National Union*) et il a assuré la promotion des enfants de certains des barons de son régime : le fils d'un vieux leader abaluhya et neveu de Moi devient vice-président ; le fils Ngala est chargé de contrôler la Côte ; Uhuru Kenyatta devient le candidat à la présidence. À ces jeunes qui se sont donnés la peine de naître, s'ajoutent quelques autres trentenaires : Sunkuli chez les Maasai ; Nyaga (fils d'un ministre de Kenyatta et de Moi) chez les Embu...

des différents groupes sociaux dans cette dérive.

L'élection ne met pas seulement en scène l'élite et le peuple. Cette occasion ménage une place particulière à des personnes habilitées à dispenser des conseils aux uns (les leaders) comme aux autres (le peuple). Kamaru explique que les élections sont un « *trou de serpent dont il faut s'approcher à l'aide d'un bâton expérimenté* » (*Message to the Youth*, vol. 2, Face A). L'auditeur comprend aisément que Kamaru fait partie de ces bâtons indispensables pour gérer le danger. Il fonde ses avis sur sa relation à Dieu qui lui permet d'interpréter correctement le passé. En effet, le peuple court le risque de confondre le leader avec le dictateur car il manque de « *connaissances* ».

Kamaru a tendance à présenter le peuple comme un groupe passif mais l'intrusion des débats de la politique de l'intime dans ses démonstrations nuance, peut-être involontairement, cette perception.

Les femmes et le nationalisme kikuyu contemporain

Les femmes n'étaient pas absentes du nationalisme kikuyu de la première génération (Peterson, 2004, chap. 7) mais elles y entraient par effraction, à travers des discours facilement marginalisés par l'élite. À l'évidence, l'idéologie nationaliste a essentiellement fonctionné contre leurs intérêts puisque la nouvelle identité politique a imposé avec succès une interprétation des coutumes foncières qui oubliait leurs droits sur la terre. Elle les cantonnait dans une position d'acteur dominé et incapable d'accéder à la prospérité source d'accomplissement de soi. Cela a conduit de nombreuses femmes à développer des stratégies alternatives de réussite économique à travers notamment le commerce des légumes qu'elles achetaient à la campagne pour les revendre en ville. Mais les nationalistes ont durablement lutté contre ces velléités d'indépendance financière. Or cette politique de mise en dépendance des femmes ne pouvait s'épanouir qu'à condition que les hommes démontrent leur capacité à assumer leurs responsabilités sociales. Or la conjoncture économique puis politique a empêché les hommes de s'assumer en véritables chefs des unités domestiques.

Le développement précoce (dans les années 20) du capitalisme dans

la Province Centrale a créé une stratification sociale marquée et de nouvelles inégalités qui limitent fortement l'accès à la terre. Or comme l'explique D. Peterson (2001 : 473), « *land poverty was an ontological problem for Gikūyū working men* ». En effet, la plupart des hommes ne peuvent plus créer leur propre exploitation agricole familiale. Leur soif de terre les a conduit dans la Rift Valley où près d'un tiers des Kikuyu a trouvé refuge dans les fermes des Blancs où on ne leur octroie qu'un statut fragile et constamment menacé de squatter. Ceux qui sont restés dans la réserve doivent souvent louer leur force de travail aux leaders des sous-clans (*mbari*) qui ont transformé les règles de la propriété foncière en faisant disparaître tous les droits des dépendants (*ahoi*). Or, ces jeunes et moins jeunes qui deviennent des salariés appauvris n'ont plus les moyens de payer les compensations matrimoniales dont les montants connaissent une spirale inflationniste. De la fin des années 20 aux années 60, l'accès au mariage honorable est largement verrouillé par les riches. Les pauvres se trouvent ainsi interdits de reproduction socialement acceptable. D'où les extraordinaires tensions sociales qui traversent la société kikuyu et dégénèrent dans les années 50 dans la guerre civile Mau Mau qui est avant tout une révolte des cadets sociaux contre des aînés qui ferment l'accès aux ressources matérielles et humaines (Lonsdale, 2004).

L'âge d'or de l'ère Kenyatta (1963 – 1978) calme provisoirement ces frustrations. La prospérité des premières décennies de la post-colonie qui repose sur le développement de la culture du café, la ré-ouverture de la Rift Valley aux Kikuyu et l'opportunité de nombreux postes dans la fonction publique permet aux hommes kikuyu de retrouver le chemin du mariage honorable. Mais la crise économique des années 80 amplifiée par les dérives anti-kikuyu du régime Moi ferment à nouveau la capacité des hommes kikuyu de fonder des foyers domestiques en respectant les règles sociales admises. De nombreuses femmes ont alors fondé leur propre famille sans la présence officielle d'un homme¹⁰. De plus, la généralisation de la scolarisation dans la zone kikuyu a permis à ces femmes d'accéder à une plus grande indépendance financière ce qui leur a donné l'occasion d'étendre leur influence notamment en prenant en charge les parents âgés souvent délaissés par les fils.

¹⁰ Chez les Kikuyu et contrairement à ce qui se passe chez les Abaluhya ou chez les Luo, les enfants nés en dehors du mariage reviennent à la famille de la mère.

Il apparaît alors un nouveau discours nationaliste qui accuse les hommes de ne plus remplir leurs responsabilités ce qui menace l'unité de l'ethnie. Ces paroles de femmes affirment que le lien social est assuré et pris en charge par les mères. Ainsi, elles revendiquent de nouveaux droits, en particulier dans le domaine du foncier où les normes continuent de fonctionner au seul profit des hommes, situation particulièrement injuste quand ces hommes renoncent à leurs obligations. Pour autant, ce nationalisme est tout aussi conservateur que celui des aînés. Il plaide en effet pour un puritanisme exacerbé : si les femmes veulent devenir les acteurs dominants de l'identité kikuyu, elles doivent être plus morales que les hommes, davantage en accord avec les traditions des ancêtres (Maupeu, 2003).

Le *Benga* kikuyu constitue l'un des sites principaux où cette version du nationalisme est énoncée. Ce type de musique est devenu depuis les années 70 le site privilégié de discussion des idées sur l'identité kikuyu. Or, depuis les années 90, les femmes investissent massivement ce genre artistique, cela avec un grand succès commercial. Ces chansons sont diffusées lors de multiples concerts, à travers les cassettes et maintenant les CD. Surtout, ces femmes ont profité de la libéralisation des ondes FM. La principale radio kikuyu, *Kameme FM* appartient à une femme et s'est constituée une identité de radio de femmes. Ainsi, *Kameme* est devenue la caisse de résonance de la version féministe du nationalisme kikuyu et devant le succès rencontré, les revues féminines ont pris le relais.

Kamaru, le roi du *Benga* kikuyu ne pouvait rester indifférent devant l'interpellation de ses collègues-femmes. En effet, le succès du *Benga* féminin vient de la remise en cause de la misogynie des chanteurs, de la contestation ironique de leurs plaintes sur la difficulté d'être un homme dans la société actuelle. Dans ses cassettes électorales, Kamaru ne répond pas directement à Queen Jane et autres reines du *Benga* car dans ses homélies, il se veut un acteur religieux et non plus un chanteur. D'autre part, son sentiment à leur égard est ambivalent. Il souhaite que les femmes restent à leur place dans l'unité domestique car elles sont les garantes de l'honneur du mâle et car la transmission des traditions passent avant tout par elles. Mais également, il défend leur promotion collective. Ainsi, dès ses cassettes de 1992, il se dit très favorable à la démarche de Wangari Maathai tant au niveau de ses mobilisations

politiques que de son action associative. En effet, *Green Belt*, l'organisation de W. Maathai est une structure qui s'efforce d'impulser des opérations de développement par le bas à travers les groupes de femmes (Maupeu, à paraître). Ainsi, les élections doivent promouvoir les jeunes mais également les femmes. Pour autant, Kamaru reste silencieux sur les revendications féminines dans le domaine du foncier. Il sait que la véritable ouverture du nationalisme kikuyu se situe à ce niveau.

Conclusion : Kamaru et les autres mises en scène kikuyu de la nation

Quelles relations Kamaru entretient avec les intellectuels de l'écrit ? La différenciation entre l'intellectuel de l'écrit et celui de l'oral est largement artificielle. De nos jours, le mode d'expression induit des publics particuliers mais n'influe peut-être pas sur le contenu du message. Ainsi, les artistes oraux sont utilisés par les écrivains : le style en langue kikuyu de Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o doit beaucoup à Kamaru ; de mêmes, les historiens radicaux ont interprété la crise Mau Mau, notamment à partir des cassettes de chansons Mau Mau de Kamaru. Également, Wahome Mutahi a reconnu sa dette à l'égard de Kamaru, tant dans ses œuvres en anglais qu'en langue kikuyu. Inversement, Kamaru connaît les œuvres de Ngũgĩ et apprécie les pièces de théâtre de Mutahi.

Pour autant, l'œuvre de Kamaru ressort avant tout de la « *politique des bars* » (Maupeu et Mbũgwa wa-Mũngai, 2006). Depuis la fin des années 80, les églises et les tribunaux sont ponctuellement devenus des tribunes publiques où s'engageaient les débats populaires sur les relations politiques. Les bars également sont d'inévitables lieux de discussion civique. Ainsi, David Parkin a décrit dans son analyse de la sociabilité luo de Nairobi les « *républiques du football* » qui se tissaient autour des bières. Cette analyse des années 60 – 70 met en évidence les lignes de continuité qui se tissaient de la politique footballistique par le bas jusqu'à la haute politique opposant les deux grands leaders des Luo, Tom Mboya et Oginga Odinga. Chez les Kikuyu, le football est nettement moins politisé que chez les Luo ou les Luhya. Néanmoins, les hommes kikuyu participent de la très dynamique culture des bars.

Depuis les années 90, les formes artistiques présentées dans les bars kikuyu se sont diversifiées. La seconde démocratisation a libéré la parole

et cela se traduit dans les bars par de nouvelles propositions d'expressions. On peut sensiblement distinguer quatre types de paroles.

Durant les week-ends, de nombreuses pièces de théâtre en langue kikuyu sont jouées dans ces bars. Les plus fameuses sont celles de Wahome Mutahi qui ridiculisent le système monarchique républicain qui concentre le pouvoir entre les mains d'un seul homme. Indéniablement, sa pièce la plus populaire chez les Kikuyu est actuellement Makarira Kioro (« Ils vont pleurer dans les toilettes ») qui met en scène la camarilla de Moi qui s'est réfugiée dans des toilettes publiques à la suite d'un coup d'état et qui tente de survivre à travers des contacts avec le sous-prolétariat.

Joseph Kamaru constitue à lui seul un genre artistique. C'est la mémoire coutumière de l'éthnie.

Le *Benga* reste l'expression artistique dominante des bars kikuyu. Ces chanteurs abordent essentiellement le thème des relations hommes / femmes.

Les *Mũgithi* enfin incarnent la politique des jeunes. À travers des reprises ironiques des standards du *Benga*, ils expriment les revendications des cadets sociaux dans un style proche de celui des chansons de circoncision.

Ces quatre genres artistiques ne peuvent pas être analysés séparément dans la mesure où ils fonctionnent dans les mêmes lieux et qu'ils s'interpellent continuellement. Ces formes d'expression mettent l'accent sur la dialogie avec le public mais également avec les expressions concurrentes. Ainsi, les bars instituent de véritables « *conversations démocratiques* » (Peterson, 2004 : 226) où le contenu du nationalisme kikuyu et kenyan se renégocient constamment.

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Artistic Discourse and Gender Politics in the Gĩkũyũ Popular Song

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This paper seeks to demonstrate discourse shifts of gender politics in Gĩkũyũ popular song. The point of departure is the overwhelming influence of patriarchy in the early Gĩkũyũ popular song productions that appear to have been male-dominated. This had its ramifications on gender projections until women artistes came onto the musical scene. Because of this, the artistic discourse has moved towards a counter balance with the inclusion of not only female voices, but also exposure of the patriarchal impropriety which had been overlooked and/or understated in the earlier male-dominated discourses.

Gĩkũyũ popular song is an important genre of contemporary verbal art. Like all oral forms, the popular song is endowed with a dynamism that gives it multiple possibilities of mediating reality based on keen observation and interpretation of phenomena. Changing historical, social and ideological realities give rise to characteristic forms of artistic expression, which seek to reflect on and interpret new phenomena. Popular song rose in tandem with the ‘new phenomena’ created by the rapture within the African indigenous history and way of life through the colonial experience. The term ‘popular’ in this regard refers to those secular songs associated with the contemporary Gĩkũyũ society that reflect the post-colonial realities of urbanisation and modernity. These songs are generally performed by semi-professionals who lack formal training, and usually do not take an intellectual view of their work. Perhaps the most important and distinguishing feature of the popular song is its association with the electronic mass media. Popular song goes hand in hand with the media—it is disseminated primarily

through the media and is embedded in a music industry based on marketing of recordings on a mass commodity basis. Popular song has been referred to as “*the most significant event in the twentieth century music*” (Manuel, 1988: v). It has special importance as a socio-cultural phenomena for it embodies and expresses social identities which emerge as products of urbanisation and modernisation against the background of traditional systems. The rise of the popular song in Kenya was a result of the socio-historical and cultural changes in the colonial and post-colonial era. Neither the traditional ‘folk’ forms of verbal art, nor the imported western styles could fully express the changing social realities. Rather, this apparently new type of song sprung up. It syncretised and reinterpreted old or new elements of orature in a distinctive literary expression.

The growth of the Gĩkũyũ popular song must then be seen as pararelling the growth of the colonial and post-colonial Kenyan societies in general and the society in particular. The community inhabits the peri-urban districts to the north and west of Nairobi City. Like most other communities, the Gĩkũyũ have been affected in all aspects of life by urbanisation and modernisation. The popular song is therefore one of the most important genres of verbal art in contemporary Gĩkũyũ society.

Approach and method

The paper uses narratological analysis in the analyses and interpretations of this paper. According to Kabira and Masheti, (1995), narratological analysis recognises that any written, visualised or broadcast text contains within it a gendered perspective that mirrors the reality of the subject and object. This refers to that which is written about, that which is spoken about and that which is visualised. Narration here refers to the process of presenting, representing or making something come alive. In the case of the popular song, narration will be taken to mean the presentation of observed, experienced, felt or imagined situations, presented by popular musicians in a subjective way. The musicians present the voice of the narrating figure. Narratological analysis acknowledges that often, there are multiple actors and voices in

the same text presented via any given media. The aim of narratological analysis in this situation is to identify the different elements within the text and expose them to a systematic scrutiny to establish their gender responsiveness. Narratological analysis proceeds by asking and responding to a series of questions that reveal the gender responsiveness of the text. In the analyses of the paper, questions from narratological analysis in examining gender politics in the artistic discourse of the Gikūyū popular song will arise. The questions include: Who acts? Who speaks? What is the nature of the speech? Whose speech carries more weight in initiating action? Who tells the story? Who has the power? How is the power exercised, maintained or perpetuated? Song texts will also be examined in terms of language use, that is: Who is named? Who is not named? How does naming or not naming contribute to the general impression of the listener on the persons in the song by gender? What male and female images does the language use project? What images, symbols and general associations are used within the text to refer to the females?

Roots in patriarchy of popular song expression

In introducing the popular song, various influences and manifestations are mentioned. These should lead to an initial understanding of gender politics in the popular song and the genesis of skewed gender presentation through its roots and expressions in patriarchy. Traditional culture is indicated as having a significant influence in the experiences and expressions of the Gikūyū popular song. Wainaina (1998) demonstrates a close relationship between the contemporary Gikūyū popular song and traditional Gikūyū orature. This paper further posits that the Gikūyū popular song is influenced by traditional gender roles with their internalised norms and values of patriarchy. While in traditional society there were various songs for different groups—male and female, young and old, married and unmarried—the context of modernisation and urbanisation in which the popular song grew, privileged the male voice and muted the female voice. This was to the extent that initial artistic expressions of the popular song were predominantly if not exclusively male. Urbanisation

meant mobility. Thus, popular musicians had to be mobile within the rural-urban circuits. In fact, there are many Gikūyū popular songs that centre on the theme of urbanisation and its challenges, opportunities and mixed fortunes. Mobility would obviously favour the men who traditionally are the breadwinners and whose roles have socialised them into the highly mobile rural-urban circuits. Modernisation meant that musicians had to have access to the technology of music recording and production on a mass basis. Women have not had equal or easy access to non-traditional technologies and this then meant that their voices could not be initially represented in the popular song genre. In Gikūyū popular song, there is hardly any female artist of merit among all the early popular song artistes. Since women would have had no access to the social circuits and instruments of production of the popular song, male voices populate the growth of the genre, with the consequence that its genesis is rooted in patriarchy. This is one aspect that the Gikūyū popular song shares with other forms of artistic expression from all patriarchal civilisations. In fact, this is a point of convergence with the written western literary tradition. Like most of African civilisation, all western (Anglo-European) civilisation is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideology. Early literary traditions in western literature portray patriarchal women and female monsters of Greek and Roman literature and mythology. Traditional western philosophy presents women as non-rational creatures and relies on phallogocentric thinking (thinking that is male-oriented in its vocabulary rules of logic, and criteria for what is considered objective knowledge), by educational, political, legal and business institutions. Even the development of the western canon of great literature, including traditional fairy tales was a product of patriarchal ideology (Tyson, 1990/91). While the patriarchal roots of western literary traditions are fairly well examined, orature scholars are yet to engage the patriarchal roots of the popular song, tracing its developments and gauging its achievements in an era where gender has become an important aspect in the humanities and social sciences. This paper is an attempt in this direction. By narratologically analysing songs from early male popular musicians, it seeks to expose phallogocentric artistic expressions evident in the songs. Further, it seeks to demonstrate how the introduction of female voices in the popular music scene has changed the discourse in the songs.

Patriarchal narrations

Expressions of patriarchy in Gikūyū popular music range from the provocatively sexist expressions that take biological essentialism for granted, to the mildly gender sensitive half-hearted attempts to present female perspectives without being critical of the patriarchal ideologies that keep women oppressed. Illustrations of such patriarchal expressions will be drawn from an album by Joseph Kamarū, who was one of the earliest and best-known male Gikūyū popular song artists. The cassette is a collection of his best hits of the 1970s and 1980s. It is entitled, *Kamarū, Good Times: Special gift*.

One of the striking aspects of the popular song was the glorification of the mother figure. In categorising women, the mother is seen as a glorious creature who is beyond reproach. In fact, early Gikūyū popular musicians, who were all male, adopted their mothers' names for their artistic identity. The most prominent of these include Kamarū Wa¹¹ (son of) *Wanjirū*, Rugwiti *Wa Njeri*, D.K. *Wa Maria*, Ndūrū *Wa Gathoni*, Gacherū *Wa Wairimū*, Kinyua *Wa Eunice*, C.D.M. Kiratū *Wa Njeri*. Beyond this glorification of the mother, she does not feature in any significant way as an actor in the narrations of the songs. In the *Good Times* cassette for instance, the mother is mentioned in passing and only in relation to lovers and wives.

Closely following the glorious mother in artistic expressions of patriarchy is the glorified lover. This is the all-satisfying, all-beautiful goddess who satisfies all the needs of the male and is then placed on a pedestal and worshipped. In one of the songs in the *Good Times* cassette, the speaker starts with images that are supposed to glorify his lover. She is likened to “a ring on a finger... pyjamas... a mirror reflecting the light of sun... or a ripe orange in the summer”, in a song entitled *Tūgatigithanio nĩ Gikuū*—only death will make us part. One notices that in the attempt to glorify the woman the artist uses inanimate objects. The images used have nothing to do with human personality. ‘A ring on a finger’, ‘pyjamas’, ‘a mirror reflecting light’ are all images of possession. Yet, there is the idea of intimacy but only such that can be had with inanimate objects. Inasmuch as the image of ‘a ripe orange’ projects beauty, it also has a connotation of use, since the most one

¹¹ * The conjunction ‘wa’ stands for son/daughter of

can do with a beautiful sun-ripe orange is either to eat it or to sell it. Thus, these images of glorification of the woman project de-personified women in the minds of patriarchal men as being available for 'use'. This is the quality from which they acquire meaning and purpose.

The woman is often portrayed as the all-submissive, all-giving, 'good' woman. When women do not fit their given images, skewed patriarchal expressions often portray an ungrateful, wayward, 'bad' woman who brings nothing but misery to the man despite his 'generosity', 'patience' and 'selfless servitude' to her. In the *Good Times* cassette, the woman in the song *Nũũ ũcio* (who was that), finds herself on the receiving end of the man's wrath for coming out of her present lover's house at night, to talk to an unidentified man. The present lover who is the speaker in the song starts by subtly prodding the woman to explain who she had gone to talk to and why. The song is filled with innuendo of the female lover's perceived unfaithfulness:

*My darling tell me who it is that has knocked on the door
Since you nearly stumbled over and fell going to meet him,
What were you discussing outside for thirty minutes,
If you love me, tell me who that was.*

*Stop panicking my darling I am not agitated,
I know there is no home without guests,
But I will not go to sleep before I get to know,
Who is that guest who comes to visit you at 1a.m.*

Pointing to the fact that the woman seems to be anxious, the man claims that he is not upset. Ironically, he confesses that he is disturbed enough not to sleep before answers are provided. The speaker here portrays the 'good guy' image of a controlled, patient and reasonable man. In emphasising his understanding nature, fairness' he claims,

*I do not want to jump to conclusions and say he is your lover,
But I don't know why you had to open for him
And it is as if you had agreed on the time,
Since you dashed so fast without putting on the light.*

Significant in this analysis is that the woman in the song never responds. Despite what he says, the man begins to get impatient and his accusations are more pointed. He claims to have had a gut feeling

that something was going on between the guest and the woman. His use of language changes and becomes more accusatory. He implores the woman,

Darling why can't you 'be honest' and 'disclose' who that was.

He evens starts to threaten,

If it were I who met him, things would have been ugly.

It is significant to note that the woman does not respond to the man. He therefore concludes that this is a sign of guilt and promptly informs her that he has other options. He advises her to go and live with that other man since they are not held together by any binding oath. This example shows a man giving a story and making allegations of impropriety about a woman who does not talk back. Silence then becomes a strategy of male power and authority. The woman is portrayed as a guilty party with silence being evidence of her treachery. The decision to send her away is solely the man's and it is non-negotiable. This brings in the question of who has the power and how it is used. The perspective given in this song is that of a man as the song is sung by a man. This reinforces stereotypes about women—they lack tact and have nothing to say. The man is thus the judge and the executioner. He wields power over the woman and decides when and how to dispose of her. The woman in this song is thrown out without the listener ever having the opportunity to hear her side of the story.

In another song *Reke Ngwītīkīrie*—let me set you free—a lover is accused of having illicit relationships with other men. The male speaker is 'graciously' and 'without confrontation' or being 'unreasonable', allowing the wayward lover a 'time-out' to have as many relationships as she pleases.

The unnamed addressee in the song had invited the speaker,

*So then, you had invited me to come,
To see the photographs and the letters
That you had taken with them,
And other photographs were taken when you were naked,
When one despises the other,
They behave like a well-fed lion,
That eats hoofs,
Having been satisfied with meat.*

Having seen the letters and the photographs the speaker acts in a calm and controlled manner saying,

*I shall not instigate a confrontation,
Since we are in the city,
And there may be no one to separate us,
So, let me set you free*

The song *Ndūgīūke* (come then) depicts a scenario similar to that in *Reke Ngwītīkīrie*. The speaker has stumbled upon some photographs and is addressing the lover.

*I have for a long time now insisted this is your lover
And you vehemently swear that you don't know this person,
You claim you just have an easygoing relationship,
Yet there can be no easy going relationship between a cat and a mouse
Come then, Come then, and see the letters
And the photographs you have taken to express your love
Come then and see like this one,
Where you are giving a ring so that this person can be yours.*

These two songs, *Reke Ngwītīkīrie*, and *Ndūgīūke* are a good example of the gender implications of 'naming' or lack of it as revealed in narratorological analysis. In the Gikūyū language, personal pronouns *Nīi* (I) *Wee* (You), *Inyuī* (You – pl.), *We* (Him or Her), do not carry with them gender markers. It is therefore possible to refer to the second person *We*, equivalent of 'him' or 'her' without disclosing the gender. Thus the only way one can know the gender of a second person is through other gendered referencing, for instance clothing, behaviour etc. By far the easiest and direct gender marker is names e.g. 'Wainaina' is male and 'Wambūi' is female or, directly disclosing the gender of the referent by for example saying 'you woman' or 'you man'. Note that in analysing gender presentations and exposing gender biases, it is important to say who is named and who is not. The implications of this can be demonstrated in these two songs to show how lack of naming in the Gikūyū popular song disadvantages women. In both songs, naming is not done and therefore the gender of the 'actors' i.e. the *dramatis personae* in the songs is not revealed. The second person (the lover accused of unfaithfulness in both songs) is not named, neither is the third person (the one having a relationship with the lover

being reprimanded) named. The male ‘voice’—that of the singer—is the immediate indicator of gender relations. Therefore, since the *dramatis personae* are not named, someone listening to the song will ascribe gender to the ‘dramatis personae’ using the male voice (the voice of the singer, Joseph Kamarū), as the point of reference. Given this scenario, the understanding of the songs will be that a ‘male’ lover has discovered, in both instances, that ‘his’ lover, who will in this case be taken to be female, is unfaithful. Thus, the songs’ interpretation will lead to the conclusion that women are unfaithful.

While the male voice in the song would lead one to the conclusion that the culprit is female, there is no hard evidence in both songs that the culprit is actually female. In fact, if one analyses the songs keenly, there are insinuations that even though the *voice* is male, the *speaker* in the song is female and therefore the culprit is male. In *Reke Ngwĩtikirie* the speaker uses masculine images to refer to the wayward lover. The speaker says the lover is behaving like a “*well-fed lion, that eats hoofs, having been satisfied with meat*”. Even though the speaker has been jilted and is annoyed, (s)he says that (s)he cannot afford to over-react and leave during the night, and asks to spend the night and leave during daylight. This caution would generally, though not exclusively, be associated with women. The speaker only lays claim on a certain photograph which had been taken by the beach and which was of sentimental value. The speaker also accuses the unfaithful lover of “*hiding away the dresses so that they can have a chance at other relationships*”. This again may suggest that the speaker is female. Again, the third person that is having a relationship with the accused lover is referred with the Gikūyũ third person plural ‘O’ meaning ‘they’ or ‘them’. This indicates that the unfaithful lover is having multiple illicit relationships, which are generally associated with men.

In *Ndūgĩũke*, circumstantial, contextual and linguistic analysis shows that the speaker is female and the culprit is male. In an effort to conceal the illicit relationship, the accused lover has gone to Nakuru, Kisumu, Lukenya and Mombasa. This kind of mobility implies a resource base and social network that is generally associated with men. When questioned about this high mobility, the accused lover “*became violent*”, again a ‘male’ reaction. While confronted with the evidence of unfaithfulness in another instance the accused lover replied, “*Gūtĩrĩ*

njamba ya mwera ūmwe”—a cock does not belong to a single hen. The image of the ‘cock’ and the ‘hen’ as used in the proverb indicates that the culprit is male and the offended speaker is female. In one of the photographs, the accused lover is giving an engagement ring. Men generally give engagement rings. The above analysis shows that artistic expressions that are not gender specific disadvantage women in interpretation. Even though the culprit in these two songs may be male, a casual listener to the songs would be inclined to conclude that the culprit is female. Gender-neutral pronouns of the Gikūyū language only serve to reinforce patriarchal images and interpretations that disadvantage the woman. This is a situation that would be avoided if the *dramatis personae* in the songs are named. The effect of naming and how it affects artistic discourse will be analysed later in the paper. A further exposition of patriarchal expression in the *Good Times* album by Joseph Kamarū follows.

In *Mūtondo Wa Wendo*—murky love—the male speaker launches a scathing attack on a female lover who has written a letter to him saying that their love should come to an end. He starts:

*You refused to tell me
That you will one day leave me
And I gave you all my love
Now you write to me
Saying that we should part.*

The speaker asks if there are more copies of the letter, so that she can send them to the speaker’s sister and her mother since these two had played a key role in ‘misleading’ him that she was a good choice. He says:

*I wonder how many copies of the letter you made
Since I would like you to send one to your mother
And the other to my sister in Nyīri
Because they are, the ones who made me get into this mud.*

All the three women in the speaker’s life—the friend, her mother and his sister are shown to have contributed to the speaker’s present predicament and it is now their fault that he is in this quagmire. It is understood that the speaker could not or was not allowed to make an independent choice. The failure of the relationship and the present wretched condition of the speaker all demonstrate how women ‘lead’ men into unwise decisions and choices.

In *Mwega ni Ūrīkū*—who is the ideal lover—the male speaker laments that his lover is leaving him, even after he has done his best to provide everything that she could possibly need. Instead of being content, having been well provided for, she now wants to terminate the affair:

*Who is the ideal lover?
That one can live with
If this one wants to leave me
Yet, she has never eaten dry maize leaves
I give her choice foliage
Yet, she wants us to part
Who is the ideal lover?*

The imagery of “*dry maize leaves*” and “*choice foliage*” is used to show providence.

The speaker wonders what else he can do beyond giving her the best of everything. He expresses discontent at the ungratefulness of women. His verdict is that he is better off without this ingrate and he declares his intent to look for a replacement.

Kīūru—the bad one—is a lament by a male speaker on his life and that of his family, which have been wasted working for a mean capitalist, named *Kīūru*, which literally means ‘the bad one’:

*How lucky can you be Kīūru?
To employ me and employ my wife
My daughter to look after your children
And wash your under garments.
Thirty years I have worked for you
Yet, I have never made a thousand shillings
My family lives from hand to mouth
Despite all the work we do.*

The speaker enumerates the stinginess of the employer and his woes. The reason he is now bold enough to talk about these things is revealed at the end of the song:

*My son has returned
With a degree from abroad
I hear he will be the manager
At the firm where you work
Take your implements and farm tools
I will no longer need your job.*

The speaker’s son has escaped a lifetime of exploitation and acquired

an education that will liberate the family. Evidently, salvation for the family cannot come from the sister whose whole life has been spent toiling in Kĩũru's household with her parents while her brother got an education.

With the negative portrayal of an exploitative male employer, the listener also gets the picture of the son who sets the family free from their oppression. The song thus has not done much to deconstruct patriarchal values that it presents as exploitative.

In *Thĩ ĩno ĩrĩ na thahu*—this world is wicked—the speaker portrays a society that has gone bad because of the wayward behaviour and licentiousness of men, women, young men and young girls. The song describes various scenarios to demonstrate how the morals of the whole society have degenerated. Gender specificity of the referents in the song is significant. *Aanake*, young men, are portrayed as careless, licentious and arrogant.

*The young men of these days have no comma
They have no punctuation or full stop
They have no question mark they do what they please
If you look carefully, you will only find exclamation marks.
Every girl they meet they tell them
“I will marry you”
Tomorrow when they meet another one they say
“I will marry you”
By the end of the week
They have ‘married’ seven girls
And they have no means to marry
And neither are they bothered...
This world is really wicked.*

The speaker says of the girls and women:

*The girls of today have no shame
When the mother is selling lemons
She is also selling oranges.*

This can be understood to mean that young girls are competing with older women because they are young and ‘sweet’ like oranges. Notice the repeated use of the orange imagery.

The speaker also has much to say about old men:

*Old men are the worst
Young girls ride in the back seat of their cars
While fools, say it is the son's daughters*

*If at the bars
A young man expresses interest in the girl
The man roars like a hungry lion
And if the young man insists
He will find himself behind bars.
He is no longer an old man
Money has turned him into a teenager
(He tells the teenage lover)
“Young girl, here is a seven roomed house for you
In addition, learn driving
I will buy you a car at the end of the month
However, let me never find your age mates here
Whatever you desire
Money is as plentiful as millet
And never mind my wife
There is nothing she can do to you”.*

This song is significant because it indicates a trend where men are portrayed as villains but only as part of the larger villainous society. Their behaviour and character is subsumed into the behaviour of a larger society. As the title *This World is Wicked* implies, men are only part of a larger wicked world. It would be pointless to blame them. Yet, one cannot help and see the effort the speaker takes to detail the behaviour of men and their wily and wicked ways. Not much is said about women. The song would still have a lot to enumerate without the three lines that talk about the role of women in the wicked world.

Kamarū's *Good Times* cassette represents the general trend of patriarchal expressions in the Gikūyū popular song. The songs analysed present trends of a glorified mother, a glorified all-submissive 'good' female lover who makes a good possession for a man, an ungrateful and jumpy thankless capricious female villain, a generally wayward society of men, women, boys and girls that is in need of salvation; a faithful male lover keen to provide but who is taken advantage of by the unappreciative female lot, and the dutiful son who rescues the family from danger, sorrow and exploitation.

These trends are identifiable in the poetry of all early male popular song artistes. Evidently, the initial artistic discourses of the popular song were tilted against a vilified female persona, whose voice was never heard.

Entry of the Queen: the woman talks back

In the 1980s and 1990s, the female voice broke through the popular song scene. One of the most prominent female performers to emerge in this era taking her place among the giants of Gikūyū popular song was a youthful, and highly talented Jane Nyambura, who has now come to be known as Queen Jane.

By the mid-1990s, her music was entrenched itself on the Kenyan music scene as “*most original, most well-arranged and quite pertinent with the social issues that affected the society*” (*Kenya Times*, March, 1997). Queen Jane has been described as a talented composer with a melodious voice and the talent to fuse the old and new, producing inspiring lyrics that conveyed nostalgic messages of the past in refreshing contemporary tunes. She burst onto the music scene in the late 1980s when she lent her feminine voice to several famous Gikūyū musicians. She sang back-up for various bands, at one point teaming up with Simon Kihara “*Mūsaimo*”, in his band Mbiri Stars. She has also collaborated with other musicians for example Jimi wa Eunice. Her talent initially was made use of by the male patriarchal enterprise discussed above until she stood on her own, and formed Queenja Less Band. With an independent female voice on the scene, the artistic discourse changed, and the patriarchal ideologies of its roots would be seriously challenged.

Queen Jane seeks to explore uniquely female perspectives. She does not hesitate to attack patriarchy and reverse images of female villainy and a victimised innocent male. The following section illustrates the reversed gender images in Queen Jane’s lyrics using one of her compilations titled, *True Colours*.

Queen Jane does not take advantage of the seemingly gender-neutral language to be vague about the gender of the *dramatis personae* in her songs. She directly names the male villains in her songs. She describes the undesirable behaviour of men, totally reversing the images of male innocence portrayed by early male singers.

In the song *Mūici Wa Itūra*, ‘the village thief’, the speaker castigates a good-for-nothing *Mwanake* (young man) who has turned out to be a notorious village thief. His criminal credentials detailed in the song are

not only shocking but also horrifying. The *Mwanake* is simply evil. The speaker addresses herself to the village thief:

*You have terrorised your parents,
They cannot even have a cow, a goat, or chicken,
Because young man you steal and sell them.
You are shameless young man,
To terrorise your own parents*

*You have become a notorious village thief.
Yet, you have hands and legs,
And you are as energetic as other men,
Yet, you can never work for yourself,
You take what others have worked for.*

*Even in your whole village,
No one can own chicken,
Because you behave like a wild animal.*

*Young man you are of age,
Yet, you do not have a wife,
Because no girl in the village,
Can accept to get married to you,
Year by year you are in and out of prison,
Because of your stealing habits,
Soon you may be shot dead.*

*The villagers are happy,
When they hear you are in jail,
Because when you are around,
No women and girls can move freely.
When you are around,
They move under guard,
Young man you have terrorised them.*

The dissatisfaction of the village and legal authorities is expressed in the song. He not only steals everything he can lay his hands on, but he also insults and physically threatens his parents. He is virtually a jailbird who cannot stay out of jail for any considerable amount of time. The villagers are happier when he is in jail, since they can enjoy relative peace in his absence. Such a villainous male personality is hardly ever depicted in Gikūyū popular songs composed by men. The spectrum of social activities and relations portrayed by male singers does not venture into extensive images of male villainy.

The village thief has other credentials, which indicate a different portrayal of social relations that expose patriarchy as oppressive to women. The village thief coerced his parents to accord him his

inheritance which he sold then squandered the money. All he does now is,

*Terrorises the children of his sister,
Because she is not married,
And the children may inherit the remaining property*

*When high on drugs,
He destroys everything on the land.*

The village thief terrorises the children of his sisters because they will inherit from his father, who is their grandfather. This situation exposes the injustice of a patriarchal system, which prevents females from inheriting property. The situation at the village thief's home represents potentially explosive tensions between males and unmarried female siblings in a traditional society. Among the Gikūyū, women are expected to get married and leave the parental homes. They therefore can lay no claim on their fathers' property, which is considered the rightful inheritance of male children. The sisters of the village thief are single parents and he therefore considers their children as threats since their grandfather may decide to make them heirs to the family land. This is an unacceptable situation to the village thief. These unmarried sisters are an economic nuisance as they are seen as having an illegitimate claim on the family's inheritance, of which land is the focal asset. The village thief antagonises his sisters' children not because they do not deserve the family inheritance, nor because he deserves it any more than they do, but simply because a patriarchal system has socialised him to expect to inherit from the father by virtue of his being male.

The song further exposes the absurdities of patriarchy by subtly satirising the behaviour of the village thief. He does not directly confront his sisters or father in relation to the perceived illegitimacy of any claim that may be made on the family inheritance. He instead insults and terrorises the sister's children. Children are not only innocent but also may not understand why they are victims of his wrath. The village thief thus exposes his cowardice. It also shows that he is not really convinced of his rights, otherwise he would easily confront the real players. The traditional image of masculinity where men are portrayed as alert, powerful and in control is subverted. The village thief is not able to significantly or effectively fight for what is 'supposed' to be his. In expressing cowardice, timidity, destructiveness and weakness, the village thief becomes a specimen of 'feminine' qualities. This is one way

in which Queen Jane subverts the original expressions of patriarchy. She portrays the male as possessing the negative qualities that patriarchy has traditionally ascribed to women.

The songs in the *True Colours* cassette are categorical about who the adversary is. As opposed to Kamarū's method of using gender-neutral Gikūyū language to the disadvantage of women, Queen Jane clearly uses the Gikūyū expressions *Mwanake* (young man) or *Mũthuri* (man) when chastising males on their negative behaviour. In another song *Tiga kwiyamba*, the speaker begins with the statement “*Wee mwanake ũyũ...*” meaning ‘you young man’. The word *kwiyamba* is a derogatory term referring to a body posture that expresses boastfulness and arrogance. The title can therefore be translated to mean ‘stop your boastfulness and arrogant attitude’. The *Mwanake* is chastised for being boisterous and arrogant, with no regard for others just because he is wealthy. His behaviour is satirised by using a satirical image where the *Mwanake* is said to “spread himself out like an umbrella even when there is no rain”. This image is used to show his vanity since it is meaningless to open out an umbrella when there is no rain. His pride is revealed as vain when we are told that whereas he has money and a sleek car, he actually has nothing at his rural home and his parents live in abject poverty. He has divorced his real wife, abandoned his children and taken up a mistress who has children sired by other men. He is eager to provide for the mistress’ children while his own go without basic provisions. He is being warned that his vanity and lack of responsibility towards his own family will lead to his downfall. Without social responsibility, wealth is shown to be vain and not worth boasting about. The image of a provident, responsible, innocent man given in the previous songs by male artists is subverted. Male irresponsibility and lack of self-control is shown to be the cause of family disintegration and suffering.

A *Mũthuri*¹² is addressed in *Mũthuri Teenager*. The *Mũthuri* in the song is behaving like a teenager, having illicit and fleeting relationships with teenage girls in total disregard of the social expectations towards *ũthuri* (eldership). The *Mũthuri* does not want to be addressed as *mzee*—old man—since he wants to indulge with young girls in the city.

...Me Jane I have seen wonders,
from men of these days,

¹² An old man.

*They are pretending to be young,
By courting young girls,
Calling themselves Teenagers.*

*In this Nairobi,
They are the notorious ones,
Because if you call him Mzee
You have thrown a stone in the police station*

*They reply; 'Look for a Mzee in your father'.
They apply polycolor to their hair,
To hide the greying parts,
Young men, you stand no chance.*

The old men, *Athuri* are competing for 'youthfulness', and for young girls with their teenage sons. They have lost the goodwill and respect that would have been earned through adult-like behaviour, as expected of them by society. The song details the atrocities of these old men masquerading as teenagers, and reveals their hypocrisy, bad intentions and deliberate recklessness that leaves a trail of destruction. Yet, they are said to jealously protect their own daughters from exposure to male violation while they show disregard for other peoples' daughters. The speaker addresses herself to young girls and admonishes them about these men. She reminds young girls that in them are vested the dreams and toiling of their parents and communities.

*Girls let me tell you,
If you are not careful.
These Sugar daddies I tell you,
Will not let you get education,
They are ruining the children of poor people,
When they show you money
You lose your head,
You will eventually become a barmaid.
While his daughters become graduates.
The reason why your parents took you to school,
Is so that you can help them in future,
They have toiled hard for you to go through school,
Now you will get pregnant before you complete school,
From a man of your father's age,
And he will ruin your life,
And poverty will remain in your home.*

She advises young girls that they should not let their future be ruined by these unscrupulous men. The speaker reminds them that being derailed from school by these men will imply that their poor parents hard work is in vain and that the cycle of poverty will continue

in their families. In this song, men are shown as sabotaging the social dream of advancement and better quality of life which is significantly shown as being achievable through the education of girls. The same theme has been addressed in a song entitled *Thĩ ĩno ĩrĩ na thahu* (This world is wicked), by Kamarũ.

This invites a comparison in the treatment of the subject in the two songs to reveal inadequacies of male treatment of the subject of male villainy. In Kamarũ's song, the wickedness of the man accused of deceiving young girls is given in only one stanza and is seen only as part of a wicked world of men, women, boys and girl. In Queen Jane's song, the wickedness of the man is the subject of the entire song, with the effects of his anti-social behaviour on the general advancement and well-being of society highlighted. In Kamarũ's song, focus is removed from male behaviour and focuses on the larger social behaviour, which is shown to be generally negative. Queen Jane's song focuses on negative male behaviour and shows how it generally affects and frustrates well-intentioned efforts. Additionally, Kamarũ's song *Kĩũru* shows that the salvation of the oppressed family comes through the son. In this song by Queen Jane, girls are displayed as the dream-carriers of their families and societies.

Apart from directly subverting patriarchal expressions that depict the woman negatively and foregrounding negative male behaviour, Queen Jane reaffirms female dignity and independence to correct the image of female timidity and submissiveness portrayed by patriarchal voices. This will be analysed in a song by Queen Jane titled *Ndagũtũmĩra aini*, 'I send to you these musicians', and a song by Albert Gacherũ, a Gĩkũyũ male popular musician, entitled, *Faith Wangeci* (a girl) who is the subject in the song.

Both songs deal with fan adoration, a common occurrence in the pop music scene. Due to their exposure to the public through the media, artistes get admirers who may go to great lengths to be noticed by the object of their admiration.

In both these songs, artistes are objects of fan admiration. However their response to their fans invites analysis that again subverts the image of female frailty prevalent in artistic images of patriarchal influences.

In Gacherũ's song, a girl named Faith Wangechi calls him to tell him that she has fallen in love with him. He is quite excited about this and begins a steady correspondence with the girl. The fact that the girl comes from a wealthy family is not lost on the speaker. He is thrilled that a rich girl is interested in him. He receives a photograph of the girl, which sends waves among the male singer fraternity.

*Faith asked me to send her a photo,
And she sent me a 'hot' one of herself,
When I showed it to Kĩmani,
He was drooling all over it,
And when Kĩgia saw it,
He went mad.*

The girl plans a rendezvous in Mombasa and sends him an air ticket. Being from a humble background, he is overwhelmed and eager to board a plane. At the airport in Mombasa, while running towards him, the girl trips, falls and dies. This is the tragic end to the story, thus dashing his hopes of marrying a rich girl.

The situation depicted shows a man who is easily swayed if not downright vain. His vanity causes him build useless dreams based on his illusion of a star-struck female fan. His male colleagues are just as feeble-minded and offer no sensible advice to their colleague. The men reveal their own lust as seen in their reaction to impressionable fans. This reaction can be contrasted with that of Queen Jane in her response to a male fan, who claimed to have fallen in love with her.

In *Ndagūtũmĩra aini*—I send to you these musicians—there is none of the drooling and excitable reactions seen in Gacherũ's song. When the man in the song sends love letters to the speaker, her response is dignified and defiant. She sends seven musicians to the man with the message that she is not interested in his advances, and his correspondences to her must cease. The artistes that she names in the song are well-known male Gĩkũyũ musicians—D.K. wa Wanja, Mark B. James, Timona Mbũrũ, John Ndemethiũ, Jimmy wa Unĩ, Sammy Mũraya and Kĩnyua wa Thingira. Curiously, she sends men to go and deliver the message to the fan. It is obvious that the fan is known to at least one of the male artiste, Kĩnyua wa Thingira. In the song, we are told that the fan had sent Kĩnyua to her, and assigned to him the task of helping him woo and win her.

*Kĩnyua wa Bibilioni has told me,
The way you persistently pester him,
Promising him,
Kĩnyua wa Thingira if you deliver Jane to me,
You will eat a goat,
And step on a crate of beer*

The woman is portrayed as a trophy to be won and delivered. The expression, “*you will eat a goat and step on a crate of beer*” implies a celebration. A Gĩkũyũ celebration entails the slaughtering of a goat and drinking of beer. The implied conquest here shows that the woman really has no say in the whole matter; she is merely a trophy to be won. In response, she sends seven men to reaffirm that she has a mind of her own. The message of ‘wooing and conquest’ delivered by one man is responded to with a message of ‘rebuttal and defiance’ delivered by seven men. The message she sends re-appropriates a predominantly male image. She says,

*...I have sent you those famous artistes
To tell you I am not lifted by one jack*

A jack, *njeki* in Gĩkũyũ, is the instrument used for raising heavy weights off the ground, particularly one for raising the axle of a motor vehicle in order to change a wheel. It is used in the song to depict female strength and resilience. Since the motorcar is considered a male instrument, handling of a *njeki* is a male affair. In fact, men always run to ‘help’ a woman change a car tyre more from the fact that she is a woman rather than the economic benefit of quickly-earned money. The speaker reckons that she is ‘too heavy’ to be lifted with one *njeki*. This concretises the extent of defiance and resilience of the woman and her contempt for male conceit and presumptuous attitude in discussing a celebration of a conquest that has not achieved; given the *status quo*, it is cannot be achieved.

The reactions of the artistes in the two songs once more indicate the powerful rendering of gender politics in artistic expressions of the Gĩkũyũ popular song. Female voices reaffirm the dignity and independence of the woman while exposing the pitfalls of patriarchy and male domination.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the roots of Gĩkũyũ popular song as being anchored in patriarchy. A narrative analysis has been used to probe the shift in its rendering of gender politics. Since the nature of the popular song privileged male artists, initial portrayals of social attitudes, practices and values presented skewed expressions of patriarchy. These expressions portrayed the women as villains, and did not deal in any significant depth with male indulgences, impropriety and wickedness resulting in artistic expression patterned along male-oriented thinking. Images of patriarchy praise motherhood while portraying wives and lovers as ingrates, stubborn, submissive and destructive. Male villainy is understated as part of a larger society that has gone bad. Linguistically, the understatement is reinforced by the omission of the gender of villains in some songs that could have been interpreted to chastise men. There is great need for a female voice and an alternative perspective on gender in the Gĩkũyũ popular music scene. This alternative has been provided by Queen Jane, who has brought male villainy to the fore, showing how male recklessness and destructiveness frustrates individual dreams and the larger social vision. The patriarchal image of a strong male is also subverted to expose weak, good-for-nothing, visionless men who are a liability to society.

The Gĩkũyũ popular song is thus a vast arena where examination of gender politics can fruitfully reveal the oppressive nature of patriarchal systems. Representation of female voices needs to be emphasised to redress the imbalance caused by patriarchal expressions. The entry of Queen Jane into the Gĩkũyũ popular music arena can be seen as a milestone in enriching social discourse in the genre and providing a different perspective. This enriches artistic discourse and broadens the scope for meaningful possibilities of interfacing gender politics.

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Music

Artiste: Joseph Kamarũ

Cassette: *Good Times*

Producer: City Sounds Production.

Tracks referred to:

Kĩũru

Mũtondo wa Wendo

Mwega nĩ Ũrikũ

Ndũgĩũke

Reke Ngwĩtikĩrie

Thĩ ĩno ĩrĩ na Thahu

Tũgatigithanio nĩ Gĩkuũ.

Artiste: Queen Jane

Cassette: *True Colours*

Producer: Wamaitu Productions.

Tracks referred to:

Mũici Wa Itũra

Mũthuri Teenager

Ndagũtũmĩra Aini

Tiga Kwĩyamba

Artiste: Albert Gacherũ

Cassette: *Ya Rũanio*

Producer: Wamaitũ Productions

Tracks referred to:

Faith Wangechi.

The Poetics of Gikũyũ mwomboko: Narrative as a Technique in HIV-AIDS Awareness Campaign in Rural Kenya

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Introduction

The emergence of HIV-AIDS scourge in the early 1980s when the first case in Kenya was diagnosed necessitates finding a solution to curb its spread in the nation. The government must find preventive and curative measures to reverse the trend of 500–700 Kenyan citizens perishing daily as a result of the pandemic.

Since HIV-AIDS was declared a national disaster by the president, then all Kenyans have been prompted to participate in creating awareness of the disease in society. Several forms campaigns have evolved with time, notably the use of religious activities. The church fraternity especially the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) are actively involved in church drama competitions, which have enhanced the campaign against HIV-AIDS and other social problems, like drug abuse, domestic violence and political thuggery. In synthesizing the activities of religion and society, faith-based organisations (FBOs) have emerged as an avenue of creating HIV-AIDS awareness. There are FBO publications which enhance the mission of the HIV-AIDS campaign.

Along with the church's role in the HIV-AIDS campaign, women groups, for instance the Nyakinyua among the Gikũyũ in central Kenya are involved in the awareness campaigns. These activities are revamped through community-based organisations (CBOs), which

focus on community development. Youth organisations such as Young Men Christian Association (YMCA), Youth Catholic Society (YCS) and Christian Union (CU) groups have emerged as means to reach the youth who are adversely affected by the pandemic.

The Ministry of Health has also been active in the campaigns as evidenced by their various publications. , The erection of giant billboards in urban and rural areas indicates the urgency of the matter. The most prominent billboard in Central Kenya reads: “*Mũkingo ndũrĩ ndawa, mũndũ o wotho no araware mũkingo mwĩmenyererei.*” This translates as ‘AIDS has no cure. Anyone can fall victim to it. Beware of AIDS.’

This paper notes that there are various modes of awareness creation, and *Mwomboko* poetry is one of these. It applies linguistic allowance in oral poetry to capture various target groups in the Gĩkũyũ community. The print and electronic media in Kenya is also active within rural and urban Kenya. In Nairobi, Central and parts of Eastern and Rift Valley Provinces, FM radio stations play a significant role in reaching the populace. Examples of such stations are *Kameme* 101.1 FM and *Coro* 102.3 FM. *Coro FM* notably organises music extravaganzas in Nairobi and its peri-urban centres where multitudes turn up to watch and listen to pop stars. The most recent of these was held on 8 March 2002, at Ngong Stadium in Kajiado District. It is at such rallies that some musicians sing about the HIV-AIDS pandemic.

The *Nation FM* and *Citizen FM* stations also organise talk shows discussing the spread of HIV-AIDS and the need for behavioural change as a means to combat the disease. The Kenya Broadcasting Corporation’s national, general and vernacular services in different parts of the country have also contributed along with the print media—*Daily Nation*, *Sunday Nation*, *Taifa Leo*, *East African Standard*, *The People Daily*, *The Kenya Times*—which also publish feature stories which focus on the scourge.

Socio-historical origins of Mwomboko poetry

Mwomboko poetry is a genre which emerged between the late 1930s and early 1940s. It was a response to the emerging socio-cultural

interferences resulting from the arrival of the White colonialists in Kenya. The indigenous Africans felt threatened by the foreigners who promoted their own culture while castigating the Africans'. This paper notes that the precursor of *Mwomboko* poetry was *Mũthirīgũ* poetry which emerged in 1920s. This was a vigorous local social protest dance, which embraced traditional African culture against the colonizers. Consequently, it was an avenue of both social and political protest. The White man was irritated by this dance as it espoused female genital mutilation and alienated Africans who abandoned this rite of passage.

This caused a rift between the African traditional conservationists and the new converts of White man's religion. The white regime in power banned the performance of *Mũthirīgũ* around 1930. This prompted the emergence of *Mwomboko* among the Gikũyũ. The soldiers and carrier corps of World War I (1914–1918) and World War II (1939–1945) brought with them the accordion which they tried to integrate as an accompaniment to the traditional-cum-modern dance *Mwomboko*. The fusion of a Scottish dance and indigenous African dance movement resulted in the vibrant *Mwomboko* dance. Most conspicuous in it was the satirizing of the White man's dance which appeared soft and non-vigorous. The satirical structure is reinforced by vigorous movement, the clang of the bell, which the singers call *Karĩngarĩnga* and the skilful *Mwomboko* multi-rhythmic beat. As Maranga wa Gatonye, a *Mwomboko* singer observe, the new Christian schools discouraged the performance of indigenous African traditional folk songs and dances as these were scornfully termed a heathen's affair. This only strengthened the popularity of *Mwomboko*, first viewed as by the colonisers as a pseudo-European dance. Being a traditional-modern dance, *Mwomboko* was created by anonymous composers and as such, the copyright of the genre belongs to the Gikũyũ community. However, there are some notable artistes who performed as premiere *Mwomboko* (composers) singers. These include Athman Kĩrĩro wa Tharimu, Gachungi wa Kamau alias wa Kĩnanda, John Arthur wa Mũhũga, Cinda Gikombe alias wa-Watĩrĩ, Meja wa Wanjirũ, Valentino Ndirũ wa Kang'ethe alias Nabuu wa Njei, John Mũniũ alias Kĩrĩma wa Waithĩra alias Kĩgaragaro, Kĩbĩra wa Mũthia alias Kwĩrenga Beni ya Mũgũre, Onesmus wa Nyaikamba, Mũkweri wa Kweri, Hitler Njũgũna, Chema Ikue, Kabũĩ ka Arũme, among others.

The late 1950s and mid-60s produced the other performers from example Mwangi wa Gachaũ, Bernard Gĩtahi Kiai, Maranga wa Gatonye, wa Gaithari, Wanganangũ, Meciria, Loreto Ndirangũ, Mwangi wa Kĩnyenje, John Kĩragũ alias Wakĩnanda and H.M. Kariũki. In the late 1960s, Joseph Kamarũ, a popular Gĩkũyũ musician, also tried his hand at *Mwomboko* poetry before turning to *Elithi* and *Benga* beats from the 1970s to late 1990s when he converted to Christianity. In Kenya's history, *Mwomboko* is one of the dances associated with the Mau Mau armed struggle. The youth involved in the dance were unhappy with the suppression, prejudices and exploitative nature of the White man's colonial administration. The composers wrote allegorical poetry ostensibly revolving around love affairs, but on close examination indicated that like the proscribed *Mũthĩrĩgũ* songs, they were actually satires on the White man. To advance socio-political awareness to the populace, the song genre became a weapon to spread propaganda. The song *Hũrĩra Tindo*, (drive in the chisel) which symbolizes freedom fighters was instrumental in 1946 in forging unity and supporting the armed struggle against the British imperialist regime.

Political activists, for instance those of Kenya African Union (KAU) schemed on how to administer oaths to the Gĩkũyũ youth to encourage them to join the armed struggle. The activists arranged a *Mwomboko* performance during which unsuspecting singers and dancers were incorporated into the freedom struggle through oath. The artistes then turned into Mau Mau guerrillas who operated mainly in the Aberdares and Mount Kenya, symbols of Kenya's freedom. The colonial powers later banned *Mwomboko* poetry as it was attributed to agents of agitation and aggression against the regime. Some Mau Mau songs sang during the war period use *Mwomboko* tunes, thus rendering *Mwomboko* poetry associated with the struggle for freedom.

In post-independence Kenya, the genre has continued to be used as singers choose the old tunes and attach new themes on the social, economic and political concerns of the nation. This study explores the role played by *Mwomboko* in the HIV-AIDS awareness campaign—the disease is not only a social problem but also an economic dilemma in Kenya, Africa and the rest of the world. Recently, the United States of America pledged to establish a 'Millennium Fund' to be used in the fight against HIV-AIDS in the developing world.

Performance of Mwomboko poetry

Men and women of all ages perform *Mwomboko*. The dancers are controlled by an accordion player who teams up with a bell-player to maintain the rhythm and tempo of the music, central to the performance of *Mwomboko* dance. The disparity between various age groups is noted in various dance movements, which characterize the dance. There are those performers who began performing in the 1940s who are men and women in the 70–80 age bracket. These dancers exemplify the authenticity of the *Mwomboko* dance, which evolved in 1940s. They relish maintaining the original dance styles, which were formulated by the first singers of *Mwomboko*. These dancers are very popular especially on national days, public holidays and other cultural activities reflecting on the oral history of Kenya. They appeal to diverse audiences in all echelons of the Kenyan society.

The place of performance is significant to the overall meaning of the artistic dispensation. This is especially true as singers of *Mwomboko* compose themes on the spur of the moment. This implies that if the performance is in a wedding ceremony, the place of the bride and the bridegroom is extolled by flowery language, exaggerating the qualities of the couple. The physical appearance of the couple is likened to the kingly and queenly qualities of an indomitable lion-lioness duo that has overcome all manner of life obstacles before saying “*I do*.” The guests at the wedding ceremonies appreciate and ululate to crown the celebration of the event in the traditional-cum-modern way.

There is still a group of dancers are in the 60–50 years age bracket. They also try to keep to the original *Mwomboko* dance style. However, since they learnt from their predecessors, they have made variations to the movements but most conspicuous in the performance is their maintenance of the accordion and the *Karĩngarĩnga* as musical accompaniments. Men play the former but the bell is played by either male or female performers. This age-group is very popular in political rallies, fundraising functions, wedding ceremonies and community activities. An example is the Pumwani *Mwomboko* dancers from Eastlands in Nairobi area. They are normally very well-organised and meet for practice every Saturday at the Eastleigh Chief’s Camp. They also articulate community issues for example the spread of HIV-AIDS. Their

dress in traditional attire appeals to their target audience, old and young alike. Bauman (1992: 41) observes that “*performance usually suggests an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience*”. This realization is reflected in *Mwomboko* performance where language use and actions are intertwined for full effectiveness of any given performance.

The other category of singers falls in the 20–40 years age bracket. This group is the most flexible of the *Mwomboko* performers. They do not rely on the accordion player or the bell-player performing ‘live’. The dancers use recorded music as a back-up to their dance movements. This music is recorded in cassettes, CDs or vinyl records using modern musical instruments such as guitars, drums, organs and pianos. This type of performer is found in motels, hotels and bars and actually depends on performances for sustenance. Some record *Mwomboko* tunes of yore, which they fuse with thematic concerns of the modern society. They also combine dancing and popular theatre to ensure patronage from all ages and walks of life.

Arrangement and dance movements in Mwomboko

The *Mwomboko* stands out from other folk dances as it incorporates the modern touch of performance. The original dance style of *Mwomboko* includes:

Machi Namba Imwe (March Number One), so referred to for its pseudo-military arrangement and movement of dancers in single file. In the original performance, the accordion player faced the dancers as he sang and played the instrument. The dancers stood erect holding the collars of their shirts lifted upwards. This was followed by the clapping of hands by dancers to acknowledge their respect for the accordion player (*Beni-masta*). Today this introductory part is normally omitted but the dance movement of *Machi Namba Imwe* is practiced by the 70–80 year old group. An example of *Machi Namba Imwe* is:

*Njamaa yangu kungū, Ngūria gūtariū atia mbūiya marindi
Njenerari wa Kinūthia marakara, ngūria niguō ūkwendaga ngwīre ī nīūguo.*

My comrades oh! Kūngū! How is Mbūiya Marindi.

General Son of Kīnūthia – Anger – I am asking whether that is what you wanted –
I tell you it's okay.

This first dance style was followed by *Machi Namba Igīrī* (March Number Two), which is counted as the second movement in the *Mwomboko* dance. It is similar to *Machi Namba Īmwe* but the difference occurs when the male dancer makes an extra formation, elegantly turning around in step. It revolves around allegorical love affairs, which reflect the politics in the Gikūyū community. An example from Valentino Ndirū wa Kangethe says:

Ndirerire baba angūranīre itanathī Thika
Kwūtanga, thogora ūtarī na gīthimi nguona ta ngūhenio.

I urged my father to assist me to marry before I dissipate into promiscuity in Thika
A price without a measure! I see as if I will be cheated.

The third movement is *Koraci* which emerged in the 1940s. It is a corrupted form of the English word 'chorus'. Ironically, the singers do not sing in a chorus but it simply means a movement with simple formations that serves as a form of interlude between *Machi Namba Īmwe* and *Machi Namba Igīrī* and the *Mwomboko* style that follows.

The *Mwomboko* dance style is the fourth dance movement, around which the other styles revolve. It is the climax of the performance. The dancers move in female–males pairs. As they move they count two steps and bend down rhythmically, heads bowing and hands stretched sideways. The accordion player then directs the female dancers to touch the shoulders of males. The movement continues and then the females turn around as the men pause and grip the hands of their female partners. Valentino's version says:

Mwomboko ti hinya, Mwomboko ti hinya
No makinya meri na kuuna
No makinya meri na kuuna
Hahi! Lady Warūgūrū rendi, Waitherero rendi
Warūgūrū rendi gatunda.

Mwomboko needs no strength
Mwomboko needs no strength
It is only two steps and then you bend
Hahi! Lady Waruguru, Lady Waitherero, Lady Waruguru a young fruit.

The word *Mwomboko* is possibly a corruption of the Kiswahili word ‘*kuambuka*’, which means lifting of feet and the Gĩkũyũ word ‘*kuomboka*’ which can be translated as to dance and make merry. The first composers coined the word *Mwomboko* to suit the new traditional-cum-modern dance. It may also have been the creation of a dancer, not necessarily a singer.

Tindo (the chisel) is the fifth movement, which was formulated in the 1940s. *Tindo* is the Kiswahili word for chisel. This dance movement is similar to *Mwomboko* as the dancers move in a file to and fro in the dancing area. The difference is reflected in the counting of ‘one’ and ‘two’ steps. While in the former dance style, dancers bend, in *Tindo* they stamp their feet on the ground rhythmically in a manner that imitates the motions of an artisan/carpenter driving a chisel into wood for the purposes of splitting. They then proceed in single file and swing their bodies in zigzag postures and then march like soldiers on to war. Some words of *Tindo* are:

Hūrīra tindo, magūrū maya yokire na Jomo Kenyatta
Igikora tūmwana twa boti
Ningũthii Mariira mwana wa kwa Njeeri ngeyonere
Rendi ya nyondo inya – wūi iya!

Drive the chisel; these legs (footsteps) came with Jomo Kenyatta,
 And met the youthful comrades of 1940
 I will go to Mariira, I son of Njeeri to see a lady with four breasts – wui iya!

The next style is referred to as *Ndongomothi* (a fool). It is a corrupted form of Gĩkũyũ reference to a slow learner or a fool. The dance formations resemble those of *Tindo* but the complex swinging of body posture and gyrating cyclic formations of *Tindo* are avoided. In *Ndongomothi* the steps are slowed sideways to accommodate slow learners. Boniface Kariuki who accompanies Valentino Ndinu wa Kang’ethe revealed that this movement was a specially intended for dancers who had problems moving their bodies vigorously as they were suffering from sexually transmitted diseases, mainly syphilis and gonorrhoea. The singer says:

Ndongomothi na Kamwena ūi Ndongomothi na gacwende
Niwe nguona na ūthiũ Thahabu wa Karanja
Ngũthii Nyĩrĩ kwa Mũhoya – Ndongomothi na kamwena kinya ūguo

Ndongomothi and sideways eeh! *Ndongomothi* and syphilis
Are you the one I can see by face, the golden boy of Karanja
I will go to Muhoya's place in Nyeri – *Ndongomothi*
Sideways! March this way.

The *Njeki* (jack) follows *Ndongomothi* in the arrangement structure of the *Mwomboko* performance. It is the corrupted form of the English word 'jack', a tool used for raising vehicles off the ground. Bernard Gitahi Kiai and other resource persons revealed that *Njeki* is a symbolic reference to manhood. It is an important dance style as dancers express their prowess in lovemaking for reproduction purposes. Its dance steps assume a faster pace as compared to the others. The dancers make two or three formations and there is often a responsorial of female voices. An example of *Njeki* follows:

Njeki ūte mūine nī kamwana – Njeki ūte mūine nī kamwana
Njeki ndīmenyaga ūrī mūine – Ngūthīī rūgūrū ngūre mīēū
Ngūthīī rūgūrū ngūre mīēū – ngahande mūtaro ūrī gwitū.

A Jack that has not been sung is a youth
A Jack that has not been sung is a youth
Jack I never came to know you are sung
I will go to the west to buy arrowroot cuttings
I will go to the west to buy arrowroot cuttings
And plant them in a channel at our home.

The *Njeki* is followed by *Rumba*, which is an adaptation of the Kiswahili word *Rhumba*. This dance style is a pseudo-*Rumba* beat, danced in the *Mwomboko* art form. The dancers make three steps in their formations and incorporate the *Rumba* tempo. It is an appealing dance style, which reflects the authenticity of *Mwomboko* dance movement in the African song-narratives. Valentino sings one version *viz*:

Rumba irarī mūini, Nabuu wiitū Rumba irarī mūini
Haiya! Haiya! Mwalimu Mūhorō thikīrīria ngīcūnithia rumba
Ngīcūnithia rumba ndieciragia shatī nī īgathira
Ngīcooka kūrora ītigarīte mūhuko wa kīraikū.

The rumba has its real singers
Our Nabuu, the rumba has its champion dancers
Haiya! Haiya! Cool Teacher, listen as I lick rumba
While I was licking rumba I did not know shirts would wear out.
But when I checked, only the Kiraiku pockets remained.

Kariara marks the final of the premier *Mwomboko* dance styles. The word is derived from an all-season river Kariara in Kandara division of Maragua district. This dance style is comparable to *Njeki* and *Rumba* styles. As dancers perform, they form three lines, then add one more formation as they turn sideways, forming a *Mũũgithi* (train) as they hold the hands of their dance partners and march to and fro in the arena. John Kiragu and Ndinu sing:

Kariara na mwena – Kariara na mwena ĩ hũĩ
Kariara na mwena tita kũrĩma mũgũnda
Nĩwe nĩnĩ – Haithuru ndĩrĩ no ũndũ ĩĩ
Hũĩ kariara na mwena

Kariara move sideways – Kariara gyrate sideway I hui
Kariara move sideways – it is not cultivating a shamba
It is you, you and I – All the same I have nothing
I hui Kariara dance sideways.

This study notes that some modern performers of *Mwomboko* do not follow the order given in this section, instead playing dance styles at random. This is especially so for those who perform in nightclubs and wedding ceremonies. Maranga wa Gatonye and Bernard Gĩtahi Kĩai belong to this school, and are very popular with their patrons. Those up-coming performers who use modern musical instruments fuse rap, reggae and hip-hop in *Mwomboko* songs and perform in movements attractive to their modern youthful audience.

Music and entertainment in response to HIV-Aids awareness

Music plays a major role in socialisation, acting as a bridge between different people of different ages across the social classes. Recently, music extravaganzas have been a popular approach in the campaign against HIV-AIDS in Kenya. The Ministry of Health together with the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF) in collaboration with Africans United Against Aids Globally (AUAAG) staged a historic *Celebrate Life* music extravaganza, a show that paraded both local and international stars.

The American pop music group Kool and the Gang relayed the message on the spread of HIV-AIDS through music and entertainment. It was emphasized that it was important to maintain the status quo of 87% in Kenya of negative status (*Daily Nation*, 24 October 2002).

In the *Celebrate Life* extravaganza, among the local stars who curtain-raised for Kool and the Gang were Princess Jully, Gidi Gidi Maji Maji, the late E-Sir (Mmari Wangūi), Henrie Mutuku, Susan Kibukosya, Mercy Myra and the Mighty King Kong. Princess Jully stole the show with her *Dunia mbaya* (The world is strange) hit song, which focuses on HIV-AIDS pandemic.

DUNIA MBAYA

Dunia mbaya, dunia mbaya
Dunia mbaya, dunia mbaya
Ukimwi mbaya, Ukimwi mbaya
Ukimwi mbaya, Ukimwi mbaya

Utawacha bibi utawacha bibi
Juu ya Ukimwi, juu ya Ukimwi
Ukimwi wauwa, Ukimwi wauwa
Chunga Ukimwi, chungu Ukimwi

Utawacha bwana na watoto wako
Juu ya Ukimwi, Ukimwi mbaya – wauwa!

The world is a dangerous place, the world is a dangerous place
The world is a dangerous place, the world is a dangerous place
Aids is deadly, Aids is deadly
Aids is disastrous, Aids is disastrous

You will leave your wife, you will leave her
As a result of Aids, due to Aids
Aids is a killer, Aids is a killer disease
Beware of Aids, Beware of Aids.

You will leave your Husband, and your children
Due to Aids, for Aids kills!

Other stars who have dealt with the same theme are Daniel Kamau, Joseph Kamarū and Luambo Makiadi (Franco). The enemies of development in Kenya and other third world countries have been poverty, ignorance and disease. The emergence of AIDS has complicated the situation. In Kenya the problem is countered through CBOs, NGOs, FBOs and different government organs. The campaign against HIV-AIDS is supported by the Kenya HIV-AIDS Disaster Response Project

(KHADRP) booklet by National Aids Control Council (December, 2002: 21 of 145) which states that “*the Government will take the lead in mobilising communities, public and private sectors in the fight against HIV/AIDS.*”

The language of Mwomboko singers

The language used by *Mwomboko* singers is tailored to conform to the community and the emerging issues in the Kenyan society. They draw their images from local experiences and from the interaction with other people outside the Gĩkũyũ community. Valentino Ndinũ, Kang’ethe, Bernard Gĩtahi Kĩai and Maranga wa Gatonye as artistes have composed poetry with HIV-AIDS themes. The innovation of *Mwomboko* singers is seen in their fusion of the new HIV-AIDS message into old songs that are appeal to their target audience. As they play the accordion and bell (*Karĩngarĩnga*), they narrate the apathy of the victims of HIV-AIDS and, in a chant-like rendition, explain the causes, the suffering and measures the populace should take to avoid it.

As stated earlier, a sub-genre of *Mwomboko*, the so-called *Ndongomothi* was dedicated to the victims of sexually transmitted diseases for example gonorrhoea and syphilis. *Ndongomothi na Kĩmandi* (a fool and feasting on meat in a group) is a song that ridicules indiscriminate sex, an avenue to contracting the HIV virus.

Ndongomothi na kimandi, Tigai kũrianĩra
Nyama ya mwaki, Ndongomothi tigai kwenda
Riai nyama ya rũrimĩ, No menyererai ya mwaki!
Thũgũna mbembe nomenye, atĩ mbembe nĩ ndoge

A fool and feasting meat in a group, stop this game
The fired meat, Ndongomothi, stop your urge
Eat the tongue meat, but beware of that of fire!
Munch maize but remember, the maize is poisoned.

This stanza shows how the artiste borrows from images associated with eating of meat. The meat in this case refers to the sexual organ, which causes friction and consequently fire, which results in destruction. The artiste also draws from the image of eating maize, a staple food in

Gikūyū land. The ‘maize’—womanhood/manhood—is alleged to have been poisoned. The AIDS theme features prominently in *Mbaara ya Githima-inĩ* (the battle at the well) where water is alleged to have become bitter. This is explained in the text from a linguistic point of view to serve the interest of the target audience. Okot p’Bitek considers artistes as “*the imaginative creators of their time, who form the consciousness of their time. They respond deeply and intuitively to what is happening, what has happened and what will happen.*”

The structure and style in *Mwomboko* oral poetry depicts it as a genre that exemplifies order, discipline, organizational skills, creativity and power of imagination. Elements of unity, togetherness, family-hood and procreation of life are the values exalted in the poetry. It is a tool for social and political protests in the community. With the upsurge of the HIV-AIDS scourge the *Mwomboko* song-narratives are examined in this paper to determine how appropriate they are in awareness campaigns in rural and peri-urban Kenya.

The song-narratives identified in this paper reflect socio-cultural and socio-economic aspects contributing to the moral decadence in the community. Verbal artistes satirize the sugar daddies who engage in extra-marital affairs with young girls who would otherwise call them their grandfathers. This immorality is attributed to the financial power of Sugar Daddies that prey on daughters of financially constrained parents. Beauty is ironically castigated as an agent that tantalises sugar daddies to abandon their families in favour of young beauty queens, especially after they (men) have receive money from the coffee cooperatives and the Kenya Tea Development Authority.

Consequently, the parties involved spread sexually transmitted diseases, which in turn lead to HIV-related infections. As early as the 1940s, the composers of *Mwomboko* song-narratives were aware of the dangers of sexually transmitted infections (STI). *Ndongomothi* (a fool), dating from that era was a humorous dedication to sufferers of syphilis and gonorrhoea. As Valentino Ndinu Kang’ethe *aka* Nabuu sings, “*Ndongomothi na Kamwena, Ndongomothi na Kaswende, Ndongomothi nĩ ya itonga*” (*Ndongomothi* move sideways, *Ndongomothi* plus Syphilis, *Ndongomothi* belongs to the rich). This indicates the composer’s awareness of the ills within the community they live in. This song

Ndongomothi na Kĩmandi (*Ndongomothi* and feasting on meat) ridicules the rich people who “*feast on many lovers*” due to their affluence and lack of moral standing.

The singer narrates the inevitability of companionship and comradeship especially in dance. However, he also emphasises in the chorus that although the dancers sing, dance and also go home together, the urge to have sexual orgies should be annihilated. He advocates keeping sticking to one sexual partner at all times to avoid drowning in a deep river.

Mündū arūmie kindū gĩake, mündū arūmie mündū waake
Nĩguo, mūtikae kũgwa rūriku haiya.

One should stick to his/her thing, one should grip one's lover – it's so!
Otherwise you drown in a deep river.

Ndongomothi nĩ ya itonga wũi, No mũkingo ndũi ũtoonga wũi,
Ndongomothi na kĩmandi tĩga.

Ndongomothi belongs to the rich, *wui!* But Aids does not respect wealth, *wui* – so
Ndongomothi and feasting on meat – stop!

Waheo ributi uga sori, Ndongomothi na kĩmandi sori,
Wakana mũũno wetunya nyama

If you are offered a lift – say, *Ndongomothi* and feasting on meat – say sorry.
Too much fire burns the meat.

The rhetoric applied in creating awareness focuses on wealth and food. The rich use their affluence to induce the poor to promiscuity. The singer scorns the riches which are used to drive the nation into iniquity thus destroying the citizens' future. The same theme emerges in *Machi Namba Igiri* where a father and his son are ridiculed for 'competing' to woo the same young girl. As the old man curses his age, the girl wonders why such a competition should arise! The consequence is summed up as follows:

Wũi mũrimũ ũyũ wa mũkingo ũĩ –ndũcagũraga mĩaka
Mũkũrũ kana mũnini, nĩ kĩmiri gĩa kũmira kĩrĩndĩ
Wũi ũyũ nĩ mũgwa wa kaiyaba ũthecete o ngoro

Wui! This disease – HIV/AIDS! *Eeh* – Doesn't choose years!
Old and young alike – it is a crasher of the crowds
Wui! – This is a kei-apple thorn, which has pricked the heart.

The oral poet's linguistic skill displays his visionary attitude towards the pandemic in the community. The erosion of moral values signifies the ignorance of mankind in the face of disaster. The disease is symbolised by a *Kĩmiri* (crusher), which is a traditional tool used by the Gĩkũyũ to crush sugarcanes into bits for the preparation of the traditional brew, *Mūratina*. Like a drunkard, the AIDS victim is trapped and pierced by physical and spiritual suffering, like one pricked by a thorn in the heart. What person can survive a bleeding heart?

Similes are used to underscore the shortcomings of members of the society. In *Machi Namba ĩmwe* the singer cites a Gĩkũyũ simile, which also works as a simple saying «*Ūrimũ nota ūthũngũ*» (foolishness is like Europeanisms). This simile emphasises the agonies involved in building up the marriage institution. In *Machi Namba Igĩrĩ* the singer discusses his adventures at Kirere marketplace, using figurative language.

Twahunyūkīte ta andũ moima ithinga
Tũkiuma ndaci Kirere twina Cinda Gĩkombe
Tũgĩkinya Mariira twanogeete ta ciondo

We were dusty like people who had been mudding (huts)
 From a dance at Kirere – with Cinda Gĩkombe
 On arrival at Mariira we were as tired as *ciondos*

This kind of language displays the creativity of artistes in using figures of speech within the audience's environment. This creativity is also shown in *Mwomboko ti Hinya* (*Mwomboko* is not use of power). The singer says “*Ndonire rendi ĩmwe ĩtunguhĩte ta ndũrũme ya gĩcegũ*” (I saw a lady who was plump like a lamb). This is meant to create humour in the song text and also castigate beauty in women, as the Gĩkũyũ proverb asserts “*Ūthaka nĩ mwĩthũa*” (beauty is like an itchy skin disease). The image on love relationships and iniquities associated to it is seen in the metaphor in *Machi Namba Igĩrĩ*.

Īndereri baba angũranĩre I itanathĩ Thika kwĩitanga
Thogora ūtarĩ na gĩthimi nguona ta ngũhenio

I asked my father to help me get a wife before I indulge in the iniquities in Thika,
 For a price without a measure would deceive me.

The singer emphasises the recklessness in promiscuous behaviour

which increase the chances of getting the HIV virus. The scourge can be prevented by maintaining a sexual relationship with one partner in marriage. The singer advocates marriage, family life and the role of man and woman in procreation. These ideals are recorded in the song *Njeki Ūtarī Mũine* (a jack who has not been sung). The verbal artiste uses a food crops image to spell out his case. The arrow-root cuttings that are planted on watered channels represent the reproductive system.

Njeki ūtarī mũine nĩ Kamwana

Njeki ūtarī mũine nĩ Kamwana

Ngũthĩĩ rūgũrũ ngũre mieũ ngahande mũtarō ūrĩ gwiitũ

A jack that is unsung is a boy

A jack that is unsung is a boy

I will travel westwards, to buy arrow-roots cuttings

For planting in a canal at our place.

This ‘jack’ and ‘canal’ in this verse refer to manhood and womanhood respectively. *Gwitũ* which literally means ‘our place’ euphemistically refers to the crotch zone. The association is metonymical as it reflects the consummation between a man and a woman, for the purposes of fertilization.

The role of poetry in society is determined by the content and context of a given text. The manner in which the literary activity unfolds has a bearing with the institutions in which it is performed. As a result, the function and contexts emergent in *Mwomboko* oral poetry “*relate to specific social groups*” (Finnegan, 1977), which espouses the genre. The artistes perform in various situations—political rallies, chiefs’ barazas, weddings, birthday parties in homes of affluent people and in bars, hotels and motels. This varied exposure makes it appropriate to communicate current affairs and emerging issues, such as the HIV pandemic that is a challenge for all members of society.

The song-narrative, *Mbaara ya Gĩthima-inĩ* (the battle in the well) entirely focuses on the battle in the well of life. The metaphorical reference of womanhood as a ‘well’ signifies the magnitude of fighting to survive in a poisoned source of water. According to Valentino Ndinũ,

Kuuma Mombatha nginya Nyairobi

Nyaikuru, Gĩthumo, Gakameega –

Cooka būrũrĩ wa Gikũyũ woothe ūiyũrĩte maithorĩ

From Mombasa up to Nairobi
Nakuru, Kisumu, Kakamega
Return to Gikūyū nation – it's all tears.

This implies that HIV-AIDS is a national disaster, entrenched in major cities and towns in Kenya. The reality is that not only Gikūyū land but the entire nation is submerged in tears precipitated by the devastating nature of the pandemic.

*Mbaara ya Githima-inĩ kia ūtūūro
Kĩrĩmbĩ gwakana mūcī –
Tondū ithima iria cinyuaguo maaĩ nyingĩ nĩcĩrūrĩte*

The battle in the well of life
A flame burning in home (s)
For most of the wells! For drinking water – are bitter

The verbal artiste uses fire as a symbol to denote the socio-economic destruction caused by AIDS, apparently reducing homes into ruins. Gikūyū sages assert that “*Mūcī nĩ ndogoi*” (homes are identified by smoke); a proverb warning that one cannot tell the inner secrets of individual homesteads. However, when a homestead is on fire the secrets are consumed by flames which reduce life to death. Equally, when a drinking well is poisoned, a source of life turns into death in homesteads. Traditionally, such events are associated to bad spirits besieging a homestead. The poet warns that the current scourge is no spirit.

*Mūrimū ūyū andū aitū ti ngoma
Ūyū ūrathereria kīrīndī
Indī ngoma nĩ andū – nĩo matūmĩte ūiyūre būrūrĩ*

This sickness – our people is not a spirit
This that is drowning the populace
Though devils are people – they have enhance the spread in the entire nation

*Ūyū noota mūiyūro wa rūūĩ
Na rūtwaraga mūthambĩri
Ekite kīhindīĩ akiuma kuo mwĩrĩ waake ūkagarūrūka*

This is like the flooding of a river
And it drowns a champion swimmer
Having dived – he leaves with the entire body changed

This verse focuses on the nature of the spread of HIV-AIDS. The populace should be educated on what it is, its causes and how it is contracted. The artiste uses a simile to emphasise the magnitude of human suffering, “*Ũyũ noota mūiyũro wa rūũĩ*» (this is like the flooding of a river). The figurative language is revamped by the proverb “*rũthwaraga mũthambĩri*” an image on water. Water masses on the earth’s surface are symbolically and paradoxically used to state the dilemma the populace faces once the scourge hits victims. The following lines express the ignorance of the practice of indiscriminate sexual adventures in the community.

*Mũkingo ti ngingo ya mwĩri
Nĩ toboka naniĩ ndobokeye
Munju wambaate, ũikũrũke tũgayanage maaĩ na thambĩri.*

Aids is not a neck (disease) in the body
It is immerse – and I immerse
The murk and mire raises! And drops! We share water with *thambĩri*

The derivation of *Mũkingo*, HIV-AIDS, is from the word ‘neck’. As the victim loses weight, the neck tends to crane upwards (like cocks fighting) when one struggles to maintain an upright posture. The singer deliberately argues that the disease is not a pain that revolves around the neck; rather it is unfaithfulness in marital relationships in which ‘swimming’ in sexual intercourse assumes the spirit of competition between irresponsible people, for example in brothels. In *Mwomboko ti Hinya* (*Mwomboko* is not use of power) the singer applies a metaphor of an elephant falling into Maragua River and consequently crying out for help. The significance of the metaphor is deciphered in the following verse:

*Ngingo yakĩrĩrwo ndĩkĩraga mũtwe no mũrimũ ũyũ wa mũkingo –
Ndũũĩ mũthamaki na ndũũĩ gĩtonga kana mũthĩni wa kangoya
Hahi! Nĩ ũmagia mũtĩ mathangũ na honge mĩri na gĩtina mũraata.*

The neck is never greater than the head – but HIV/AIDS!
It does not spare a king, neither a tycoon nor a great pauper
Hahi! It dries a tree, leaves and branches, roots and the bark – my pal!

In this song-narrative, the poet opts for a popular Gĩkũyũ proverb associated to status and position in the societal hierarchy. HIV-AIDS

traverses the social ladder and lands at the top, thus destroying the richest and poorest on earth. This total destruction of life is equated to drought that reduces the flora and fauna to nothing. The language appears to be the scale that weighs the meaning of words in oral poetry. The choice of words determines the build-up of a composition into a unique and complex whole idea in a work of art. For instance, *Nyina wa Ndari* (mother to my darling) by Maranga wa Gatonye. He uses ordinary words and applies them euphemistically in a context that suits the renewed meaning.

Nindirathire kwa Njoroge mwendia wa ndaawa
Arĩ na ndaawa cia kūhoonia kwao
Arĩ na ndaawa cia kūhoonia Polio
Na Timbii na Athima

I went to see Njoroge – a dealer of drugs
 He has medicine to treat “their place”
 He has medicine to treat polio
 And tuberculosis and asthma.

The central phrase in the verse is ‘*their place*’, which symbolically stands for private parts. The idea of sexually transmitted infections arises again as a social problem in the community. It is not only an embarrassment but also drains one’s pockets. For polio, tuberculosis and asthma, the sufferers may be pardoned but for those whose suffering is at ‘their place’, it is a scornful problem, degrading to one’s status in the society.

The language applied by *Mwomboko* singers is different to that of *Gicandĩ* poetry in that the singer is free to sing without being engaged in competition as in the case of *Gicandĩ*. While *Gicandĩ* purely revolves around traditional culture, *Mwomboko* poetry embraces contemporary lifestyle and issues experienced by the modern society. Nevertheless, as Bukenya *et al* (1992: 32) asserts: «*one needs a great deal of language and grammar*» to undertake the social significance in both forms of poetry. The same is true of *Nduumo* by the Nyakinyua dancers among the Gĩkũyũ. The approach in *Mwomboko* is also different from the traditional oral forms in the song genres *Mũchũngwa*, *Kĩbaata* and *Mũthũngũci* for they focus on Gĩkũyũ traditional values and experiences of ‘*soldiers of the ethnic community*’ mainly their raids and counter raids with the Maasai

community. To some extent, it can be affirmed that the approach in *Mwomboko* is closer to what Joseph Kamarū and other secular artistes of pop songs embrace. The use of modern musical instruments in this genre has earned it popularity among fans of all ages. Most notable and unmatched in secular pop song is the use of deep symbolism in *Mwomboko* to transmit didactic values in the modern Kenyan society.

The poetics of Gikūyū *Mwomboko* poetry indicates that language is a dynamic tool of communication that can be used to inject new ideas into old structures of song-narratives to create HIV-AIDS awareness in rural Kenya. This is especially important in parts of Central, Nairobi, Eastern and Rift Valley provinces where *Mwomboko* singers should be encouraged to travel around their villages and districts to interact with the people. Open-air performances in market places and social halls should be sponsored by CBOs and NGOs or even the government, to ensure that as many people as possible are reached. It is simple and easier to communicate information through song-narratives as compared to lengthy lectures where the audience may lose interest or view it as normal government rhetoric.

Conclusion

There is need to create awareness of the existence of HIV-AIDS in our Kenya society. This can be done through various forms of folklore, which appeal to the populace. The song-narrative is a genre which emerges as an appropriate technique in the awareness campaigns especially where the Gikūyū community lives. It is evident that the language used in the 1940s by the first *Mwomboko* singers is still appreciated by today's audience. The incantation of new themes on the socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political realities of Kenya can be propelled through oral poetry. *Mwomboko* song-narratives play a vital role in community development, and could be taught in schools and colleges to advance true values of humanity in our present modern society.

APPENDIX

MWOMBOKO TI HINYA

*Mwomboko ti hinya, Mwomboko ti hinya
No makinya meri na kuuna
No makinya meri na kuuna
Hahi! rendi Warügürü rendi, Waitherero rendi
Warügürü rendi gatunda.*

*Haithuru ndiri nondü ngüría gütariü atia nîwe nawe
Naniü üri riri
Hahi! Warügürü rendi Waitherero rendi Warügürü
Rendi gatunda*

*Nîwe nawe naniü haithuru ndiri no ündü Menja
Njenerari ngüría gütariü atia üri mwegä
Hahi! Warügürü rendi Waitherero rendi Warügürü
Rendi gatunda*

*Nîwe nawe naniü ndirogüthaithira maündü no meri
Mwomboko ti hinya no makinya meri na kuna
Haiya! Warügürü rendi Waitherero rendi Warügürü
Rendi gatunda*

*Hüni müitiriro, Rendi müitiriro mararoranirie ya kianda
Hahi mararonagia ati witaguo atia ngigwite gükuhiha ni küru – Warügürü
Rendi gatunda*

*Njogu nîragüire rüüi rwa Maragüa ikiuma küina
Rwüimbo Mügoiri – üi kwa Inyathiü
Hahi! iroigaga wüi mütindu – mütinduute rüüi ndigaakue*

*Ngingo yakirirwo ndikiraga mütwe no mürimü üyü
Wa mükingo – Ndüüi müthamaki na ndüüi gitonga kana
Müthini wa kangoya
Hahi! ni ümagia müti mathangü na honge mîri na gîtina mûraata*

*Ndonire rendi imwe itunguhite ta ndürüme iri gicegü
Ngimenya na ngoro – ndürüme ngatuira ndaracia
Thinjagira nyumba. Hahi Ngigathimaga maguuta*

*Mwomboko ti rwüimbo, Mwomboko ti ndaci
Tümwana twa boti mwaigua atia?
Hahi! I ndaciariruo boti, ngirua na boti, ngihikania boti
Ngiciara na boti*

*Mühiki nyakairü nîaraitire mwana aroiga ndari nyondo
Cia kwonguo – korüo arî mügi mühiki nyakairü angiamüheire
Mwütha wa ngombe -
Hahi Warügürü rendi Waitherero rendi Warügürü rendi gatunda*

MWOMBOKO needs no POWER/COMPLEXITY

Mwomboko does not use complex acts
It is two footsteps and bending (“cutting”!)
Hahi! Lady Waruguru, Lady Waitherero,
Lady Waruguru – “a-small-fruit”.

It’s Okay! I have nothing – I am asking “How is it?”
It is you, you and me – you are charming
Hahi ! Lady Waruguru, Lady Waitherero
Lady Waruguru – “a-small-fruit”

It is you, and me—It’s okay! I have nothing
Major General! “How is it? – Are you fine?”
Hahi ! Lady Waruguru, Lady Waitherero, Lady Waruguru –
“a-small-fruit”

It is you, you and me- I am beseeching you – there are two things!
Mwomboko is not complex – It is two footsteps – then bend
Haiya! Lady Waruguru, Lady Waitherero, Lady Waruguru, Lady Waitherero, Lady
Waruguru
“a-small-fruit”.

A giraffe guy! A giraffe lady! They set off to the valley
Hahi! They were questioning – what’s your name?
I do call you – It’s bad to be short!

An elephant fell into River Maragua – it was leaving singing and
dancing jig at Mugoiri – Eeh! At Inyathiu’s!
Hahi! It was screaming – Remo-ove! Remove me from the river –
I may die.

The neck is never greater than the head - But HIV-AIDS!
It does not spare a king, Neither a tycoon nor a great pauper
Hahi! It dries a tree, leaves and branches, roots and the
bark – my Pal!

I saw one lady – As fat as a fattened lamb in “gicegu”
I knew at heart – the lamb! I will fetch its food – After
paying bride price – then be slaughtering it in the house.
Hahi! And squeeze fat out of it.

Mwomboko is not a song, Mwomboko is not a dance!
The youth of 1940s – How is it?
Hahi ! – I was born in forty, circumcised in forty,
Married in forty, and sired in forty.

The bride Nyakairu – strangled her child and justified:
“I have no breasts for suckling!”
If she was brainy bride Nyakairu – would have given it a cow’s milk.
Hahi! Lady Waruguru, Lady Waitherero, Lady Waruguru – “a-small-fruit”

MACHI NAMBA IGĨRĨ

Ī ndirerire baba angũranĩre ĩ itanathii Thika kwiitanga

Thogora ūtarī na gīthimi nguona ta ngūhenio

*Wūi Nabuu irigithathi rīakwa rīa mbere kamwana
Mūrīū ndī mūgendi na thinacara itanakinya twīgāire kīama*

*Twahunyūkīte ta andū moima ithinga īī -
Tikūma ndaci Kīrere twīna Cinda Gikombe,
Tūgīkinya Marīira twanogete ta ciondo*

*Wūi I Nabuu irigithathi rīakwa – wūi kwa Njoni Atha
Ndī mūgeendi - Na kamūiria ndīcirie – wūi īyī irigithathi
Rīa mwene ngūria gūtariī atīa ?
Nī atīa Menja Njenerari Nabuu arī gūūka.*

*Wūi njoohi īno no īrutūo mīraatina ī mihuni tūnyūire nja
Tūtige mūdū ūrī na mūka agīatha mūciī waake.
Wūi ngūku twarīire kwa Nyahīndu ī a na
Ndīari ngūūkū yarī theenge - ngūūkū twaitaga na
Mīcakwe īremete kīmino*

*Haiya! ngwīra Kīgotho angūra nīre ī - ī itanathiī Rūrīū
Kwītanga thogora ūtarī na gīthiimi nguona ta ngūhenio
Wūi nī atīa Nabuu Mūrū wa Njei - ūkuuga atīa?*

*Njira īno yoothe ya kwaambata ya gwa Karanja
Ndīrimenya nongakūgacha wa Wamwea akīrīurio maūru
Wūi nī atīa Nabuu mūrū wa Njei ngūria gūtaariī atīa.*

Ciugo: Anitii- Anitii !- Mūdū ti njege!

*Haiya! Mūdū ūrī na mūka arī kūngīra gūtwaario igooti
Na nditwario nīī ndī Nabuu mūrū wa Njei –
Ngūria gūtaria atīa?*

*Wūi nī atīa Nyahīndu mūrū wa Mūkubwa -
Wa kwa mūkubwa ona ūngīhinja no ūngīgakua no
Ūngīgathikuo ngoiga twarī naawe –
Wūi nī atīa Gīchinga wa Waithaka mūrīū ūkwendaga atīa?*

Ciugo: Kahoora -

*Wūi kihū gīkūrū noota ithe, ndonire Gīchinga maceemete
Gacungwa mena ithe,
Wūi ūkūrū noota kīgaragaro, Naake mūhiki no kīrīro –
Mwanjika atīa?*

*Wūi mūrīmū ūyū wa Mūkingo īī - ndūcagūrāga mīaka
Mūkūrū kana mūnini nī kīmiri gīa kūmīira kīrīndī
Wūi ūyū nī mūigwa wa Kaiyaba ūthecete o ngoro*

MARCH NUMBER TWO

*Eeh! I told my father to enable me marry
Before I go to Thika and indulge in promiscuity*

A price without measure – I may be cheated!

Wui! Nabuu my first-born – Young man
Son I am a traveller - and at six (at dusk)
We shall set out our will to the council.

We were as dusty like people who had been mudding
From a dance performance at Kirere – with Cinda Gikombe,
When we arrived at Mariira –
we were as tired as *Ciondos*

Wui! Oh! Nabuu my first born – *Wui!* At John Arthur's
I am a passer-by - Before I click mind –
Wui! Somebody's first born – How is it?
How are you Major General? Nabuu has come.

Wui! The *miraatina* should be removed from the brew
We boisterous youth - take it outside
Leave somebody with a wife – Calling the shots at home.

Wui! The hen we ate at Nyahindu's - *eeh!*
And it was not a hen - It was a he-goat
A hen we strangled with maize combs
It could not be slaughtered with a knife.

Haiya! I will tell Kigotho to get me married – *eeh!*
Before I go to Ruiru and swim in spelling
A price without a measure – I may be cheated
Wui! How are you Nabuu son of Njei - How is it?

The way – climbing up – along Karanja's
When I know it – I will extoll you – Wa-Wamwea
was scandalized
Wui! How is it Nabuu son of Njei – How is it?

Words: Anitii! - Antii - a person is not a porcupine.

Haiya! A married person has by-passed me
He is assisted to carry his coat – Yet I am not given a hand
I Nabuu son of Njei - I am asking? How is it?

Wui! How is it Nyahindu son of Mukubwa?
You from Mukubwa's - Be you slender – Be you dead
Be you be buried – I will proclaim – we were colleagues
Wui! – How is it Gichinga son of Waithaka –
Son ! What were you up to?

Words: Slowly!

Wui! A first born boy resembles his father –
I saw Gichinga ambushing “a-small-fruit” – Accompanied
by his father –
Wui! Old age is like a rolling sloppy ground – The girl was crying
What have you done to me?

Wui! This disease – HIV-AIDS! *Eeh* – Doesn't choose years!

Old and young alike - It is a crasher of the crowds
Wui - this is a *Kaiyaba* thorn which has pricked the heart.

MBAARA YA GITHIMA - INI

Kuma Mombasa nginya Nairobi
Naikuru, Githumo Kakamega -
Cooka bŭrŭri wa Gikŭyũ wootho uiyŭrite maithori

Mbaara ya Githima-inĩ kia ũtũũro
Kĩrĩrĩmbĩ gwakana mŭcĩ -
Tondũ ithima iria cinyuagũo maaĩ nyingĩ nĩcirũrite

Mŭrimũ ũyũ andũ aitũ ti ngoma
Ŭyũ ũrathereria kĩrĩndĩ -
Ĩndĩ ngoma nĩ andũ nĩo matũmite ũiyũre bŭrŭri

Ŭyũ noota mŭiyũro wa rũũĩ
Na rŭtwaraga mũthambĩri
Ekite kihindĩ akiuma kuo mwĩri waake ũkagarũrũka

Mũkingo ti ngingo ya mwĩri
Nĩ toboka naniĩ ndobokeye -
Munju wambaate ũikũrũke tũgayanage maaĩ na thambĩri

Woono mŭrorongo wa ngaari
Cicurũtio bendera nduune -
Mũmenye kwĩ mŭndũ mŭhenerie, nĩakĩhandĩte ndaganu

Mũkũĩ eragũo ndaari ciigamba
No njigua iragũo ĩrĩ matũ -
Rekei twikunye tuone kana nĩtũkoona njuĩrĩ njerũ

Kanyĩrĩ kainagio nĩ mwene
Nyama ya kĩmandi tigai -
Mũrĩhie ciro ngĩrĩcing'ĩ mwĩtha ndũgatwũke gĩthaana

Nĩ kieha kĩnene andũ a Kenya
Tũngĩaga gũchenjia makinya -
Tũgũthira ũyũ bŭrŭri ũgooka gũikaruo nĩ athũngũ

Mwatũ ndũteagũo ũtarĩ mwatie
Ŭgithũyũ ũũkĩ ũmenyaye -
Wahoota gũthooga njũkĩ ĩkũrathe nginya wikĩrũo irima

Woono mŭndũ ũragũthekia - thekia
Na mĩtheko na ũhinga mũingĩ -
Menyerera ndũkae kumbũria kĩhũ kĩria umbikĩrũo

Ndiroiga mũtumagie ta nduma
Mwĩthimagei na ratiri -
Bomiura ya mathabu menyai nĩ kwĩhoka mwendwa waaku

Mũtikae kũmerio nĩ kĩaama

*Kia aregi a mbaara ya wīyaathi –
 Mwikarange ta ngūrūe ikarangaga na maguta mayo*
*Githima ti githima maaī
 Marogetūo na makagwetūo –
 Niguo ciana cia Andamu cianyua ikoona ūtheri wa nduuma*
*Ngūigua būrūri wa merikani, Athūngū moimūire ndirica
 Rīria ndege ciahūrire nyūmba kici mwarabu
 Osama agūikena.*
*Mwaka wa naitini naite ūiti, nī kīroota ta kīa Amerika
 Mīitu ya Osama yaikia mbomu tūkiona nduma mūthenya.*
*Mbaara īno njerū ya mīitu yahoota gūciara ndamathia –
 Kīeha na maithori ciitūike rūracio rwa Arabu na Athūngū.*
*Talimbani maarī na Othaama,
 Nī ithīramu rīa banda – mītwe –
 Rīthīmu mūcharī mūnene ūngihutia thī yoothe kaimana.*

THE BATTLE OF THE WELL

From Mombasa upto Nairobi
 Nakuru, Kisumu, Kakamega –
 Return to Gikūyū nation -- It's all tears

 The battle in the well of life
 A flame burning in home(s)
 For most of the wells! For drinking water – are bitter

 This sickness our people is not a spirit
 This that is drowning the populace
 Though devils are people – they have enhanced the
 spread in the entire nation

 This is like the flooding of a river
 And it drowns a champion swimmer
 Having dived – He leaves with the entire body changed

 Aids is not a neck in the body
 It is immerse – and I immerse
 The mirk and mire raises! We share water with “*thambiri*”

 When you see a motorcade of vehicles
 Hoisted with red flags –
 Know there is one who has been “beckoned” at
 And has planted widely spaced seedlings

 The dead hears not the rattles –
 But “That-hears” is said to possess ears
 Let's scratch ourselves – and see whether we can spot “white” hair

 The “*Kanyiri*” dances with her partner

Leave the “group meat” alone.
Practice zero grazing – the flesh milk may turn to colostrum.

It is sadness – all Kenyans
If we fail to adjust our footsteps
We shall perish – whites will come to dwell in this nation

A bee hive is not discarded unless splitted
When harvesting honey you should know –
You may stir bees - They sting you till you
enter the “hole”

When you see one who’s smiling at you
With laughter and much hypocrisy
Take care – you may exhume a mongoose buried for your sake

I am not advocating you keep mum like darkness
Measure yourselves with scales –
The formula for Maths – know it is -the trust of your love

Don’t be swallowed by the party
of protesters of the battle of Uhuru
You fry yourselves like pigs – It fries itself with its own fat

A well is not a well – water has been poisoned
Then evil-eyed, so that the offsprings of
Adam take and see the lightness of darkness

I do hear that in America, Europeans left through the windows -
When hijacked aeroplanes kissed buildings –
Osama the Arab was happy

The year 1998 – is a nightmare like America’s
Osama’s terrorists bombed –
We saw darkness at daylight

This “War Against Terror”
Can sire a shark –
Sorrow and tears might be the bride price
of the Arabs and the Whites

The Talibans and Osama
Are Islams who plant head-aches
A rhythm, a great “*Muchari*” that can touch the entire world.

NYINA WA NDARI

*Nĩ ũũru mũno na thoni nene
Mũndũ mũgiĩma akoomete karungubĩ
Karungubĩ kanyũmba – inĩ ka magooto*

Mĩtheeko. Haha! Haha! Haha aaa!

Njũkiire kĩaanda wa Gatonye njũkiire kĩaanda

*Kwaria ma ngĩtega huuko
Na irĩa ya mbeere igwatirio nĩ Tĩrĩthia
Nĩ Tĩrĩthia wa nyina na maĩ ndari*

Ciugo: nĩweegaaaaa!

*Njaamba cia arĩmĩ ũngĩũrio woiga ũĩ ũũ na ũ?
Njũĩ wa Tailor na Mwangi mūrũ wa Kĩhuro
Mena Kĩmari mūkūrũ wa Njeri
Njooya wa Kĩago atongeretie.*

*Kũu Nyĩrĩ ũngĩũrio ũĩ ũũ na ũ
Nĩ injinia Gatende nĩ mũmũĩ - mena Macharia
Mwana wa Rũng'ae*

Ciugo : nĩ wegaaa!

*Ngeithĩrio Kanyi ndĩnama ngeithĩrio Kanyi
Ndagũita Kanyi ñ ngeithĩrio Kanyi*

*Ciugo: Gwiitũ nĩ USA – Unites States of Aguuthi
U.S.A. – United States of Agũũthi – Green village*

*Ngĩthĩĩ kwa ndari nyambaga kũhoya Ngai
Ndigacemanie mūrata na ithe wa ndari
Tondũ nyina wa ndari ti mũru ta ithe wa ndari
Nyina wa Ndari ekũnjĩtia mūrĩngiti
Nanĩngi kĩrikanĩro, nanĩngi teeni ya mbaki.*

Ciugo: Yĩ ndũkĩũĩ nĩ rũũni.

*Na ithe wa ndari akanjĩtia ngiri ithatũ
Ngũruta nakũ wa Gatonye kĩa kĩa bara
Nongũmũtiga mwarĩguo ona ngĩmwendaga*

Ciugo: I don't speaking like a child

*Na Karatina Onethimathi Njoroge mwendia wa mĩti
Wakithĩtie harambee! Thibitarĩ ya harambee!
Thibitarĩ ya harambee ĩrĩ Kĩrĩnyaga
nĩ kienyũ kĩa Ngai – watuka kĩa rũũni.*

*Nĩndĩrathire kwa Njoroge mwendia wa ndaawa
Arĩ na ndawa cia kuhoonia kwao
Arĩ na ndaawa cia kũhoonia polio,
Na Timbii na athima.*

*Nĩ wamũrega na ũũĩ nĩ wa inita
Na mĩrĩngiti ĩrĩ gwake ndĩngĩtarika
Na maguuta gwaake no ca! Ca! Caca!
Ngakĩũria wa kimbĩrĩnyĩ ekũragũo no wa iniita*

Ciugo: don't be silly!!

*Wanjũita nũgũ nogaga igũrũ rĩa ndari
Wanjũita ngoma ngomagĩra coomo ndaari
Wanjũita cenji njenjagia rendi ta ngia*

Wanjūta ngiitī ngitiiruo nī Mwene Nyaga
Wanjūta kīihu njihūrāgīrūo na kīihūri.

MOTHER TO MY DARLING

It is too bad, It is shameful!
An adult sleeping in a minute cubicle
A minute cubicle made of banana fibres

Laughter: *hahaha!*

I came along the valley, Wa Gatonye I came
through the valley
To be truthful I was trapping moles
The first one was nabbed by Teresia
Teresia a sister to my darling.

Words: *It is goooooood!*

Heroes of farming ! In case you are asked
Whom and whom do you know?
I know wa-Tailor and Mwangi son of Kihuuro
Together with Kimari, the eldest of Njeeri
Njooya son of Kiago – is leading.

In Nyeri – In case you are questioned:
Whom and whom do you know?
It's engineer Gateende – do you know him
And Macharia son of Rung'ae

Words: *It is go-o-o-o-o-o-d!*

Salute Kanyi truthfully salute Kanyi
Doctor Kanyi salute Doctor Kanyi

Words: *Our place is U.S.A. – United States of Aguthi*
U.S.A. – United States of Aguuci – Green village.

When I visit my darling – first I pray to God
That I may meet not – my friend, with the father to my love.
Because the mother of my darling isn't as bad as the father
The mother to my darling demands a blanket, and it's the promise
And ten-cent coin for tobacco snuff

Words: *yes! You know it's a loan*

My darling's father demands three thousands
Where can I fetch that – The road council?
I will leave your daughter in spite of my love.

Words: *I don't speaking like a child*

And Karatina! Onesmas Njoroge – Herbs dealer
Has put up through harambee! A hospitalconstructed through harambee -
A hospital constructed through harambee in Kirinyaga

He's a piece of God – A spell of a loan!

I went to see Njoroge – who deals with drugs
He has medicine to treat “their place”
He has medicine to treat polio
And tuberculosis and asthma

You have rejected the person - an intermediate person
And blankets at this home are countless
And cooking flat simmers – caca! Caca!
I am asking you : if a Cambridge graduate is rejected
What of an intermediate?

Words: *don't be silly.*

If you call me a monkey, I tire on my darling
If you call me a spirit, I sleep on “Coomo ndari”
If you call me uncivilised, I change ladies like gears
If you call me a dog, I am protected by God
If you call me a Mongoose, I am served with a Calabash!

NDONGOMOTHI NA KĪMANDI

*Ndongomothi na kamwena ĩ Ndongomothi na Kamwena
Nĩguo!, Ndongomothi witigire Mũkingo
Kũina nĩtũkũina na tũinũkanie x2
No nyama ya kĩmandi tũrie marubuku.*

*Mũndũ arũmie kĩndũ gĩake, mũndũ arũmie mũndũ waake
Nĩguo, mũtikae kũgwa rũriku haiya
Kũina nĩtũkũina na tũinũkanie x2
No nyama ya kĩmandi tũrie marubuku.*

*Gĩthaka nĩkĩgambu mbwe, gĩthaka nĩkĩgambu mbwe nĩguo
Ndongomothi na Mũkingo haiya
Kũina nĩtũkũina na tũinũkanie x2
No nyama ya kĩmandi tũrie marubuku.*

*Cenjiai mĩthĩire yanyu wũi! Cenjiai mĩthĩire yanyu wũi!
Mũtikaine nĩnjangĩte wũi.
Kũina nĩtũkũina na tũinũkanie x2
No nyama ya kĩmandi tũrie marubuku.*

*Kandogo na ndogondogo wũi, Nyakĩnyua iitũ
Menyererai, Ngongomothi na Mũkingo haiya
Kũina nĩtũkũina na tũinũkanie x2
No nyama ya kĩmandi tũrie marubuku.*

*Kũhoha ti kũũma andũ aitũ wũi, No kũhoha kwa Mũkingo wũi,
Ndongomothi maũndũ ti mega
Kũina nĩtũkũina na tũinũkanie x2
No nyama ya kĩmandi tũrie marubuku.*

*Rīria mūgūtua kahūa haiya, kana kūhūrura mbūni nīguo,
Ndongomothi na Kīmandi tiga.
Kūina nītūkūina na tūinūkanie x2
No nyama ya kīmandi tūrīe marubuku.*

*Ndongomothi na gacwende kinya, Ndongomothi nīguo,
Ndongomothi Mūkingo ūrī njīra
Kūina nītūkūina na tūinūkanie x2
No nyama ya kīmandi tūrīe marubuku.*

*Njigua iragūo irī matū wūi, ndindīko irī magūrū
Makinya, Ndongomothi na Mūkingo cori!
Kūina nītūkūina na tūinūkanie x2
No nyama ya kīmandi tūrīe marubuku.*

*Maūndū marīkia kūbacana, kīrīro na maithori nīcio,
Nguo ya kwihumba ya būrūri – nīguo!
Kūina nītūkūina na tūinūkanie x2
No nyama ya kīmandi tūrīe marubuku.*

*Ndongomothi nī ya itonga wūi, No Mūkingo ndūi utonga wūi,
Ndongomothi nī kīmandi tiga!
Kūina nītūkūina na tūinūkanie x2
No nyama ya kīmandi tūrīe marubuku.*

*Waheo ributi uga cori, Ndongomothi na kīmandi cori,
Wakana mūno wetunya nyama
Kūina nītūkūina na tūinūkanie x2
No nyama ya kīmandi tūrīe marubuku.*

A FOOL (NDONGOMOTHI) AND FEASTING ON MEAT

*Ndongomothi and sideways, Ndongomothi and sideways
It's so! Ndongomothi you should beware and fear Aids.
We shall dance together, we shall go home together
But we should shun feasting meat as a group.*

*One should stick to his/her thing, one should grip ones' lover –
It's so! Otherwise you drown in a deep river.
We shall dance together, we shall go home together
But we should shun feasting meat as a group.*

*A jackal has barked in the forest, a jackal has barked in the bush –
It is so! It's Ndongomothi and HIV-Aids – haiya!
We shall dance together, we shall go home together
But we should shun feasting meat as a group.*

*Change your ways – wui! Change your ways! Wui!
Lest you sing "I have wandered – wui!
We shall dance together, we shall go home together
But we should shun feasting meat as a group.*

Young girls and young mistresses – wui! Our Nyakinyua should take

Precautions – *Ndongomothi* and HIV-Aids *haiya!*
We shall dance together, we shall go home together
But we should shun feasting meat as a group.

Withering is not drying up – oh our people – *wui!*
But the withering due to HIV-Aids — *wui! Ndongomothi* – Things are no good.
We shall dance together, we shall go home together
But we should shun feasting meat as a group.

When you pick coffee – *haiya!* Or pluck “*mbuni*”
It’s so! *Ndongomothi* and feasting on meat – as a group stop!
We shall dance together, we shall go home together
But we should shun feasting meat as a group.

Ndongomothi and Syphilis – March, *Ndongomothi* and gonorrhea
It’s so! – *Ndongomothi* and HIV-Aids – it’s on the way.
We shall dance together, we shall go home together
But we should shun feasting meat as a group.

One who has ears hears, the one to be pushed has legs – feet,
Ndongomothi and HIV-Aids say sorry!
We shall dance together, we shall go home together
But we should shun feasting meat as a group.

When things fall apart, wailing and tears are
The dress to dress the nation. It’s so!
We shall dance together, we shall go home together
But we should shun feasting meat as a group.

Ndongomothi belongs to the rich – *wui*
But HIV-Aids doesn’t respect wealth – *wui!*
So “*Ndongomothi*” and feasting on meat as a group. Stop!
We shall dance together, we shall go home together
But we should shun feasting meat as a group.

If you’re offered a lift – say sorry,
Ndongomothi and feasting on meat – as a group
Say sorry! – Too much fire burns the meat.
We shall dance together, we shall go home together
But we should shun feasting meat as a group.

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Hip-hop in Nairobi: recognition of an international movement and the main means of expression for the urban youth in poor residential areas

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The expression “hip-hop” comes from Black American vernacular speech: *to be hip* means to be ‘cool’, or emancipated, *to hop* indicates to dance for a bet or for competition. The hip-hop movement has its roots in the Black and Hispanic residential areas of Queens, Brooklyn and in a larger part, The Bronx. Its origins date from the end of the 1960s with the emergence of the group *Last Poets*, a group of young Black Americans, whose lyrics had a political message (Cachin, 1996: 16). It is in the 1970s that Afrika Bambaataa¹³, a gang member, realised the futility of violence, and together with his musician and dancer friends, established a nation united for peace modeled on the tribes of South Africa, called *The Zulu Nation*. He suggested oral codes based on fundamental rules of peace and positivism.

The hip-hop movement quickly gained ground in large towns across the world. Often losing their identity between two cultures, the young generation in big towns seek validation from the streets. The difficult adaptation conditions for migrants in their new town environment create a gap between the generations. The parents of first generation migrants found their identity in the culture of their people while the younger generation identified with the urban culture. The social links between the younger generations were thus reinforced as they shared

¹³ The alias of a Zulu chief, who opposed colonisation and contributed to the unification of the South African tribes.

similar problems and anxieties. New values emerged to the detriment of traditional and religious culture. Thus, values such as solidarity of peer groups and other notions such as the notion of artistic daring in relation to self and others, and to *free style* (improvisation) occurred in the identity representation of the young. Rap, therefore seems to be “*the result of the quest for identity by the youth who find themselves in cultural interstitial and producing qualities of their own culture*” (Calvet, 1994: 274).

Africa—which did not escape from the lack of transfer of rural culture to the large metropolitan areas—experienced the hip-hop movement at the end of the 1980s. The young generation Africans in urban areas are caught between the Western way of life led in the big towns, and African values. In Africa, as in the USA or in Europe, it is always in the streets or in the ghettos¹⁴ that the youth get together to form a culture. Rap is thus borne of integration problems. This not only concerns foreigners in a host country but also migrants in towns.

The emergence of an international culture is not a new element in the daily life of Nairobi youth. It has been reflected for several years in the mode of dress, hairstyle, the music listened to and written, the vocabulary used, and the means of living and way of thinking. Several years ago, the reference point was reggae and ragamuffin. Reggae was considered the roots, and ragamuffin the actual music representing the society at the time. It was fashionable to have dreadlocked hair and to dress in green-yellow-red clothing.

In the past few years, the reference point has begun to change towards identifying with the hip-hop culture. In Nairobi, many young people dress in baggy trousers, or in clothes branded with sportswear labels (and imitations), and listen to rap music. This has led to the recent emergence of several rap groups in Nairobi. However, the attachment to the reggae culture is still clearly visible and many groups mix reggae/ragamuffin with hip-hop. The Rasta and hip-hop movements hence had similar aspects.

The Rastafarian movement was born in Jamaica in the 1930s, from Marcus Garvey's ideologies on the “return to Africa”.... He considered Africa as the promised land and its Emperor Haile Selassie as a spiritual leader (the name Rasta comes from Ras Tafari, meaning the king of kings) but since this

¹⁴ Poor urban residential areas.

spiritual leader was not interested in repatriating his self-proclaimed subjects to Africa, Garvey led a reorientation movement which forgot its initial objective (return to Africa) and turned towards liberation in Jamaica. On this point, the parallels between the hip-hop and Rasta movements are striking. Beyond these philosophic convergences, one should also note the semiological cross-referencing: dreadlocks, wearing red, orange or green berets, colours of the Ethiopian flag... (Calvet, 194: 274–275).

The hip-hop culture which brings together music, dance, graffiti and tags, mainly had an impact in Africa through music. In Nairobi, an increasing number of youth identify with the hip-hop movement, which is considered a protest movement arising from the rejection of persisting injustices. Its guiding remains the art of channelling their energies and of bypassing the rules set by the system. The similarities of those that belong to the hip-hop movement throughout the world are evident in big towns where people of different cultures, religions and language are mixed together. They converge in an area where inequalities are striking and there is an irrevocable generation gap. Originating in the USA, this movement thus propagated and gave birth to a worldwide spiritual solidarity, of peer groups that consider themselves as belonging to one culture, being the result of one environment, of a so-called “*oppressed, marginalised and exploited*” class.

African, European and American rappers will thus be found within an international movement, expressing their position faced with problems on situations that they consider similar, even though these may be different in a socio-political context (Auzanneau, 201: 715).

This paper will first reconstruct Nairobi’s hip-hop history and its ideas. The experiences of Kalamashaka¹⁵ and the Mau Mau Camp¹⁶ will be used to explain the current hip-hop situation and the major difficulties experienced by hip-hop artistes of this movement. The second phase will analyse lyrics from songs in order to extract the main themes covered and the principal messages.

The bulk of the text is based on an interview with Kamau Ngigi of the group Kalamashaka, Mtapu and informal discussions with singers from the groups Mau Mau Camp, Mashifta, Kalamashaka and Warogi Wawili. Information was also gleaned from 25 songs from 12 rap groups

¹⁵ The group Kalamashaka hails from Dandora. It consists of three rappers: Kamau Ngigi, John Vigeti and Robert Matumbai. The group is also called K-Shaka.

¹⁶ The Mau Mau Camp is a collection of about 15 rappers.

and a recording of the *Wakilisha Show*¹⁷ presented by Kalamashaka in 1999.

From street “free style”, to the studio, to the stage: the case of Kalamashaka and Mau Mau camp

The beginning of hip-hop in Nairobi

In its first years, hip-hop in Nairobi did not really stand out. The singers tried to imitate American rappers using English in their lyrics, with a more or less borrowed accent. The first hip-hop song in Kenya that was a real success was released in 1995, *Total Balaa* (total chaos) by Poxi Presha. This marked the first recognition and diffusion of Kenyan hip-hop. However, the emergence of a truly united movement started between 1993–94, with Kalamashaka from Dandora, and K-South from Kariobangi, both areas situated in Nairobi’s Eastlands.¹⁸ In the beginning, there was ‘free style’ in street rhythms, then in clubs like F2. This all started with a Kenyan singer, Hardstone, who specialised in reggae/ragamuffin and soon became a success internationally. He then left the local scene and moved to the United States. After several years, the pioneers of hip-hop made the transition from free style to writing their own songs. The first songs and the first free style performances were generally based on the Kenyan socio-economic situation, and on the poor in slum areas. In addition to Kalamashaka, Mashifta, Warogi Wawili and Wanoma, the Mau Mau camp was a collection of rappers from Nairobi’s Eastlands, formed in 1997. The name Mau Mau was chosen in homage to Kenya’s freedom fighters.

Mau Mau ilianza juu za ile *relation* ya sisi wakenya ¹⁹

Mau Mau started because of we Kenyans’ relationship,

na ma-freedom fighter yetu na past yetu ndiyo unajua, lazima tujue past

¹⁷ Demonstration show.

¹⁸ Nairobi is divided into the West—made up of wealthy residential areas—and the East, which consists of poor residential areas.

¹⁹ In transcribing this text, Kiswahili or Sheng words are spelt as in standard Kiswahili. Words of English origin are written in italics, and spelt as in English.

yetu with our freedom fighters and our past, you know, we must know our past

mahali tunatoka. Sasa tulionanga *past yetu* in-revolve around Mau Mau where we are coming from. We saw that our past revolves around Mau Mau

juu ka si Mau Mau hatungekuwa hapa, nchi yetu hatungekuwa nayo. because if Mau Mau did not exist, we could not be where we are, with our own country

Kamau Ngigi.

The move to the studio for these two groups was quite rapid. Aged about 20 years, the members of Kalamashaka recorded *Au siyo* (Isn't it?) in 1998, and *Tasfiri Hii* (translate this). The latter song was a great hit in Kenya.

Different influences

Music influences in Kenyan hip-hop are diverse. Reggae and American hip-hop are sources of inspiration to all the groups. Kalamashaka confirm that they had been specifically influenced by Bob Marley and rappers Nase, KRS One and Eminem. Other groups were influenced by the African beat, for example Gidi Gidi Maji Maji and the group K-South, which mixed *Pata Pata*, rap and Swahili rhythms in their songs.

Concerning the influence of ideas and messages in the lyrics, the Mau Mau group moulded its thought through the ideas of the Black Panthers²⁰ and of Malcom X. Kalamashaka have since included an extract of one of Malcolm X's speeches in their album. In this speech, he asks Black Americans to organise themselves like the Mau Mau in Kenya did. These examples are not exclusive to Kenyan hip-hop, but are found in hip-hop worldwide. "*The philosophies of Malcolm X that incited a movement against racial segregation in the 1960s reappeared in the 1980s with the hip-hop culture issuing from the Black American ghettos*" (Bazin, 1995: 25).

²⁰ A movement formed in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. Drawing their inspiration from Malcolm X, and also demanding Marxism and Maoism, the *Panthers* operational programme includes a series of political and social demands, and demands the right to self-defense.

The influence of the message of the music of KRS One, one of America's first militant rappers, was also a determining factor for Kalamashaka. KRS One was among the first to introduce an element of reggae in rap, preaching education and self-awareness. His piece *You must learn* denounces an American education that shamefully neglects Afro-American roots. He was also the creator of the *Stop the Violence* movement, an opinion movement taken over by the leading lights of hip-hop. Its intention is to say no to Black on Black crime. (Cachin, 1996: 45). Kalamashaka often bring up the influence KRS One has had on them as in his songs, he often refers to Africa, and more specifically to Kenya and to Jomo Kenyatta.

The philosophies of the Mau Mau camp are forged between African tradition and the Black American movement. Often confused with the Mungiki²¹ because of their name and their dreadlocks, the Mau Mau Camp declare that they are part of the hip-hop movement and consider Africa as a determining factor of the movement, despite having been forgotten by a good number of rappers, especially American ones. According to them, the hip-hop movement cannot be anything else but a militant movement, and the groups that rap without a message (both Kenyan and American rappers) do not belong. Moreover, they refer to this kind of music as “*pop*”. In their opinion, Kenya must make visible efforts in the fight against neo-colonialism and capitalism. They assert that political change cannot take place without a revolution at national level.

According to Kamau Ngigi, “*Ile rap ya street ilifanyia nirap ka watu walirap vile wanarap siku hizi, singekuwa rapper*”²². In this statement, he denounces the drift of rap towards commercialism, which has lost the origins of its message. “*In 1994 when I started rapping, rappers in the US were still in the street*”, he says.

²¹ “*Inspired by Kenyan freedom fighters, the shadowy Mungiki sect appears to be waging a political battle against the newly elected government*” Mugendi Njoka and Hezron Mogambi in BBC Focus on Africa, April-June 2003, p 28.

²² “If rap existed at the level that is currently is in the US when I started to rap, I certainly would never have become a rapper” Kamau Ngigi, 10-10-03.

The beginning of success

In 1999, the group Kalamashaka was asked host a live radio programme. The *Wakilisha Show*, aired in the evening on Nation FM, was the first hip-hop radio show in Kenya. Their stated aim was to educate the youth on a new urban culture. Thus Kalamashaka became the first radio presenters playing the great hip-hop classics, discussing the origins of the movement and its ideas. Listeners called in to present free-style or live rap. Kalamashaka helped them to improve their performance and more so, directed them on how to sing by reminding them the importance of using local language, and keeping their African roots.

ilikuwa poa juu tuli-*educate* watu juu ile kitu tuliona

It was good, we educated people, because what we came to realise

si watu wa Kenya hawapendangi kujua ni hapewangi *lesson*, unajua?
was that it's not that Kenyans don't like to know, it's just that they are not given the right lessons

hawafundishwani *the truth*

they are not taught the truth

Amerika unajua USA, kuna watu wana-*struggle* ka si tu *struggle* huku

In America USA, there are people who struggle like we struggle here

lakini sana sana ka unawa-*show* Will Smith hawawezi kujua *struggle* ni *same*
but if you mostly show them Will Smith they cannot know that the struggle is the same.

Kamau Ngigi

After six months, the show took a break and Kalamashaka left to record their album in Tanzania. Why Tanzania? Kamau N explained that it was because

kwa sababu Tanzania, kuna ile kitu inaitwa *socializing* [sic.]

in Tanzania, there is something called socialising

watu wana *support*-iangana sana halafu, wana-*support art* sana
people support each other very much and they have a lot of support for the arts

art huko kwao ni kitu kubwa huku

art is something big over there

Kenya tulifundishwa na watu wengine ma-capitalists
In Kenya, we have been taught by capitalists

Tumeri-sound-iwa tukiambiwa mamuziki ni ya majambazi ni ya mahomi,
This is reiterated when we are told music is for gunmen, it's for young men who just hang around idly

musiki ni ya ma-hard watu wameshindwa kusoma
music is for hardcores, people who have failed academically

watu hawawezi enda university, sasa hiyo trend
it is for people who cannot go University, so this trend

imeharibu sana Kenya. Sasa Tanzania it's this other round
has spoiled Kenya very much. In Tanzania, it's totally different.

Tanzania artist wanasupportiwa. Tanzania ni poa kuliko Kenya
Artistes are supported. Tanzania is better for us as compared to Kenya

After recording their album, they returned to Kenya, and left soon after for Sweden at the request of a Swedish group that had greatly appreciated their album. During the few months that they were there, they made the music video for their song *Fanya Mambo* (see annex) and a documentary on TV4, which focused entirely on them.

Kalamashaka and the Mau Mau Camp were certainly the main groups that led to the emergence of the hip-hop culture in Kenya and East Africa. Their names appeared on *matatu*²³ vehicles, and they were often asked to hold concerts. They participated in three major concerts organised by Benson & Hedges in Uganda, Nigeria and in Kenya. Their songs got to number 1 in the Top 50 hits.

Nyi tulikuwa *the first song, song of Kenya to be able ku-play huko*
We had the first Kenyan song to be played on this channel (Channel 4)

na *first song kuwa number one Afrika nzima song kutoka Kenya*
and the first Kenyan song to be number one throughout Africa

Kenya si hujulikana na wanyama ma-elephant
Kenya is known because of wild animals, elephants

lakini *music* ni West Afrika, unaona?
but when it comes to music, it's West Africa which is known, you see?

Lakini hip-hop ili-save Kenya *for once*, hip-hop ilifanya Kenya ijulikane Afrika

²³ Public transport mini buses.

but hip-hop saved Kenya for a change, hip-hop made Kenya also known in Africa

Even though Kalamashaka are famous and appreciated in Africa, and also well-known in other countries, their success did not have any consequences on their living conditions. Today, they are still in Dandora, living on very little money.

Problems encountered

The first problem pointed out by the Mau Mau group is the absence of a music industry. Unless one is produced abroad, it is very difficult to live on music in Kenya, especially on rap music. Recording a song and producing a CD is very expensive. Unscrupulous producers give rappers a pittance in payment for concerts. The second problem mentioned by rappers is the refusal of producers to produce militant rap. Kamau Ngigi has this to say on the issue:

*Rich ni wa-few, they are the minority, lakini unaona wana the influence
Rich people are few, they are in the minority, you see, but they have influence
because they have the radio station they have the TV
as they have their radio stations, and TV*

*so for them, hawaoni mtu kwanini anaimba kuhusu shida zake, unaona?
then they don't see why we sing about our problems, you see?*

*hawa wanaonaje, twendeni kuwaka Kani, unaenda kufanya sijuiaje
Nairobi West*

*to them, they only think about going out to Carnivore²⁴, what would you be
doing in Nairobi West²⁵*

*sasa wengine walikuwa wanasema tuko too serious, because message yetu
hawaguzi
some people were saying, we are too serious because our message doesn't
concern them*

*unajua hawaielewi. Sisi tukienda huko nje watu wanatuelewa unaona
you know they don't understand it. When we go out, people understand our
message*

²⁴ A trendy restaurant and disco.

²⁵ Mid-income residential area in Nairobi

lakini tukikuja kwa *presenters, DJs, rich kid*
but presenters, DJs, rich kids do not.

wakati tulifanyia album yetu, redio *presenter* wengine
when we released our album, some radio presenters

wakaanza kui-down play wakaanza: *“it’s too radical*
started to down play it, saying: “it’s too radical

nyinyi mko *serious* sana, mbona usianze kucheza boom boom” unajua?
you are too serious, why you don’t play boom boom”, you see?

wote wakaanza kutuambia, sasa wao wakaanza kusukuma muziki zao
all of them said the same thing. And then, they started to push their own
music to the forefront

una-get muziki si mzuri lakini inasukumwa mpaka ina-hit
some sub-standard music, but they play it up and it becomes a hit

unajua wimbo ukiskia over and over utastuka unaipenda na huipendi
you know if you listen a song over and over you will be surprised to like it,
even if you did not

watu wakawacha ku-rely on talent wakanza ku-rely on marketing and
promotion
people stopped relying on talent, they started to rely on marketing and
promotion

During the interview, he also accused singers from well-off residential areas of asking their friends to request their songs as dedications by e-mail and SMS²⁶ so that these songs would be played on radio and TV as often as possible. In this manner, songs recorded by non-professionals with nothing special in them became very popular in the media.

The rappers’ hopes

The Mau Mau camp have international aspirations. They invest in creating a link between the two hip-hop nations (the United States of America and France). In their opinion, international exchange would lead to a promising future.

Unaona sasa mi naonanga Kenya na hip-hop na Ghetto United State
You know, now I see hip-hop, Kenya and ghetto United States

²⁶ Short message service, on mobile phones.

*zina-link kubwa sana vile haijai-conektika kabisa
as being linked, but they have not yet been completely connected.*

*Ile kitu naweza taka yaani kuona watu waki-link
I really wish to see people connected*

*dunia nzima juu hip-hop ni one language, mi nikitoka hapa niende France
in all the world because hip-hop is one language. If I go to France*

*sitakuwa na culture shock kama zamani. Zamani bado tukatoka
I will not have a culture shock like before. Earlier we experienced*

*na culture shock si tulitoka hapa tukaenda Sweden
a culture shock when we went to Sweden*

*wanaongea different language lakini si tunaongea language moja
they speak a different language but we speak the same language*

*kwa sababu hip-hop ni ya dunia mzima sai ni opportunity
because hip-hop is for the entire world, now it's an opportunity."*

Kamau Ngigi

Lyrics: the division between militant and non-militant rap

Language of choice

Although the first rap song was in Dholuo (*Total Balaa* by Poxi Presha), it did not really reflect the reality of the beginning of rap in Nairobi. Indeed in its origins, Kenyan rap was an imitation of American rap. Even where some rappers attempted to copy American rap while singing in English and aping an American accent, some rappers claimed their African identity. Kalamashaka were the first to sing in Kiswahili and in Sheng.²⁷ Kamau Ngigi had this to say on this issue:

*Sasa sisi, Kalamashaka tukaanza ku-rap na Kiswahili
But we, Kalamashaka, started Kiswahili rap.*

*tukaanzisha yaani, tukaona ni vizuri
we started to rap in Kiswahili, and we saw that it was good*

²⁷ Sheng is an urban language that emerged in the 1970s. It's grammatical base is close to Kiswahili but with different linguistic contributions (Ferrari : 2001)

tukiji-express kwa luga ile tunaongea kila siku
to express ourselves in the language we use every day.

hakuna haja tu-rap ka wannabe unajua?
It's no use rapping like people a wannabe, you understand?

Ni fit kukiji-express na ile luga si huongea na kwa ghetto tulikuwa
tunaongea Kiswahili
*It's good to express oneself in the language that you speak, and in the ghetto,
we speak Kiswahili.*

Kiswahili rap influenced by Kalamashaka soon took centre-stage on the Kenyan hip-hop scene. The group K-South which initially used to sing in English began, gradually, to rap in Kiswahili. Some singers opted for their mother tongue for example Gidi Gidi Maji Maji, who sing in Dholuo. The choice of English, interpreted among certain circles as a loss of identity, can also indicate a desire to be heard worldwide, in an international language. To resolve the conflict between internationalisation and Africanism, some singers decide to alternate languages in their songs, so that the message can reach everyone, but they keep their African aspect. Mtapu chose a Kiswahili/English alternation; Gidi Gidi Maji Maji opted for Dholuo/English.

Major themes covered

The first theme to be considered will be militant rap. Some artistes, for example Kalamashaka, point out in their lyrics that music (rap in particular) must have a message; “*Mwanaume ana vision, muziki huwa na mission, siyo competition*”²⁸ (*Fanya Mambo*).

Recurrent themes in militant rap are first of all street and ghetto life, which is poverty. Jerry Manzekele of K-South during an interview asserts that²⁹ “*we like to speak about everyday street life and situations—we speak about what’s real and what is affecting our immediate lives, Nairobi*”³⁰ *is a classic example of what life on the streets of Nairobi is*

²⁸ A man with a vision, music has a mission, it's not competition.

²⁹ “K-South witness Nairobi”, *Phat! Magazine* 30/01/2002, on www.africaonline.com/site/articles/1,10,45208.jsp.

³⁰ ‘Nairobi’ is the name of their album, taken from the notorious reputation of Kenya’s crime infested capital city.

really about.” In his song *Ghetto Child*, Mtpa laments the misfortune of children in the slums and points out social inequalities.

Sasa mi nalia tena kwi kwi kwi
so now I cry again ‘kwi kwi kwi’

Nikicheki ghetto child hana wa kumfariji
when I see the ghetto child who has nothing to console him

hana mavazi wala riziki hana pa kulala
he neither has clothes nor provision for his daily needs; he has no place to sleep

baba mbariki
God bless him

I cry for the black woman and the child in the ghetto

some of them live in the street but they were born in the ghetto

Mwanamke hana chakula cha kulisha mtoto
a woman who doesn’t have food to feed her child

tajiri na rasilmali azitupa kwa mto
meanwhile, the rich with their wealth squander it, throwing it into the river ...

The notion of survival of the poor appears as the main issue in most of the songs. Several expressions such as “*tuna-survive, tumepigania*” (“*we are surviving, we have struggled*”) are heard. Poverty arouses temptations (robbery, alcohol and drug consumption), which are expressed by many of the groups. In the song *Vitisho – siku za mwisho*³¹, John Kigeti of Kalamashaka raps, “*Nakumbuka dhambi sita ikisema nisiibe, siku sita niliiba watoto watalala njaa na kuna bank, sikuwa na other solution.*”³² Unemployment is also one of the urban problems pointed out in the lyrics (among others, *Vitisho* and *Tafsiri Hii*, by Kalamashaka). Drug and alcohol consumption are seen as a means of forgetting one’s troubles. “*Nipate chupa za Tusker*”³³ *ili nisahau tabu zangu*”³⁴ (Kalamashaka, *Tafsiri Hii*). The singers try to explain how to fight against poverty each day. They agree that it is difficult to be role models to the youth. “*Nilijaribu kuset a good example ghetto lakini...*”³⁵ (Kalamashaka, *Vitisho*). Another urban scourge mentioned in

³¹ Terror—the last days.

³² “I remember the sixth deadly sin ‘don’t steal’ but for six days I stole. How can I leave my children starving when there is a bank? I didn’t have any other solution”

³³ A brand of Kenyan beer.

³⁴ “I get a bottle of Tusker to forget my problems.”

³⁵ “I tried to set a good example in the ghetto but...”

the texts is AIDS. Mtapu, in *Ghetto Child*, sings, “the ghetto girls destroy their bodies, they get married when they are not ready, and that is why the virus murders them”. Kalamashaka dedicated a song *We need to know* to the AIDS issue, in partnership with UNDP.³⁶ Soon after, Mr Googz and Vinnie Banton released another titled *Fed Up*.

Concerning politics, there are several points of view. Mtapu (*Ghetto Child*) thanks the government for its efforts in providing free education. “*Elimu atapata kwani masomo ni ya sare, hebu tuungane tushukuru serikali, kwani nayo mema huja polepole.*”³⁷ The members of the group Mashifta tend more towards an accusation of a capitalist system “*System ya Babylon, system ya Majambazi*”³⁸ in their song *Jambazi* (Thug). In this song they ask, who are the real thugs here? Thugs in the streets, the rich, the poor, or is it the government? The most fluent lyrics come from Kalamashaka especially in their song *Ni Wakati*: “*Ni wakati Afrika yote kusimama, ni wakati tusiishi kama jana.*”³⁹ In the same song, which is their album’s lead song, they give their key message, “*Kenya needs a revolution.*” This song generally accuses colonisation and neo-colonialism and specifically the sale of weapons in the South: “*Anajifanya ako kwa NGO, ukicheki kwenye kamusi, NGO inamanisha vitu deadly kitu safi mwenye ujuzi...anatuleta peace raha, hun hun anatu-supply na silaha.*”⁴⁰ This highly activist song was not played much in Kenya because of the severity of its message. In its lyrics, Kalamashaka did not only pitch its criticisms against the West, but also against the capitalist Kenyan government. The education system in Kenya is criticised in some parts of the song, accused of having copied the western schooling system without giving enough room to African values and history. “*Maisha yangu ni magumu nilikataa elimu, mama yangu alidhani mimi ni wazimu, siku-lose hope.*”⁴¹ (Kalamashaka, *Tafsiri Hii*).

³⁶ United Nation Development Programme

³⁷ “He will get an education because school is free; let us together thank the government; good things come slowly.”

³⁸ “Babylon system, system of thugs.”

³⁹ “It is time for all Africa to stand, it is time not live to as we did before.”

⁴⁰ “He claims to belong to an NGO... If you look at the definition of NGO in the dictionary, it refers to something good, clean, and experienced. He claims that he will bring peace and joy, but alas he comes to supply us with weapons.”

⁴¹ “My life is hard, I refused education; my mum thought that I was crazy but I didn’t lose hope.”

Poxi Presha in his song *Wape Really*⁴² and *Kalamashaka in Fanya Mambo* critically attack the exploitation of Kenyan artistes and the lack of a music industry; “*Usiweke jina langu kwa poster ama flyers kama hunikanji.*”⁴³

Respect for traditional values and African culture seems of great import in the songs. Gidi Gidi Maji Maji’s album expresses “*a strong African young mind and urges the youth to gracefully embrace their culture with pride.*”⁴⁴ Peace is an important message when Kangethe of Mau Mau Camp sings *Dandolove* (Dandora love) and calls for peace in the ghetto. The rappers generally preach non-violence as in *Fanya Mambo*, “*panga vile utakanga halafu manga, tafadhali ficha panga.*”⁴⁵

Belonging to the hip-hop movement is noted in some songs for example *Dandolove* in which Dandora is referred to as a ‘hip-hop city.’ Enhancing the status of poor residential areas where the singers live shows a sense of pride in managing to live survive under difficult conditions. In this vein, Jua Kali in *Ruka* dedicates it to his residential area, while Lenny, Mr. Googz and Vinnie Banton dedicate another to Githurai. Other groups like K-South (Kariobangi South) go to the extent of giving themselves the name of their location. Whereas some refer to their residential areas, other singers make other geographic references, mainly Nairobi. Examples are *Manzi wa Nairobi*⁴⁶ by Nonini or “*sisi wa Nairobi tunapenda hepi*”⁴⁷, from *Minanoki* by Nameless. Still others proclaim the beauty of their country and the diversity in its countryside (*Kenya* by Mtapu).

Reference to God is also present in the message in the music. Mtapu, in *Ghetto Child* sings “*All the blessings; it comes from the creator*”. However, the only ones to show a true reflection to God and religion are Kalamashaka. In their song *Kufa* (Death), they ask serious questions on the Protestant catechism, paradise, hell and death. They bring to the forefront the conflict between poverty and the existence of a god, asking God why He leaves the unfortunate on earth without any help.

⁴² Give them the truth.

⁴³ “Don’t put my name on posters or flyers if you don’t pay me.”

⁴⁴ www.cdbaby.com/cd/gidi/from/estafricanmusic/ Site visited on 1/09/03.

⁴⁵ Plan as you’d like to, then eat, but please hide the machete.

⁴⁶ ‘Babes’ of Nairobi.

⁴⁷ We in Nairobi, we like to have fun.

“Kwani nilizaliwa ama ni lesson napewa na GOD naumia ndiyo nateta kwani kwa hii dunia ulinileta Nimepigania na bado hujaniangazia”⁴⁸ (Kalamashaka, Vitisho).

Generally, in the albums produced, militant rappers include one or two songs as a distraction. Examples are *Au Siyo* (Isn’t it?) of Kalamashaka or *Ting’ Badi Malo* (wave your arms up in the air) from the *Ismarwa* album of Gidi Gidi Maji Maji.

Nevertheless, in Nairobi there are also non-militant rappers. Rap without a political message is built around several themes; girls, leisure such as dancing, discos and performance by singers. Kenyan rap being mainly male-dominated, girls are often the theme of many songs, especially those produced by Ogopa DJs. Nonini sings “*Kama we ni manzi wa Nairobi amka uanze kukatika Kenya nzima hakuna Manzi ka Nairobi, machali leo hamjalala*”⁴⁹ (*Manzi wa Nairobi*). Deux Vultures in their song *Monalisa*, sing “*Cheki Monalisa anavyotingisha tingisha, na mi nimebaki nimejazika jazika, wazee kila siku wanauliza uliza, dawa (jambo) gani ilifanya mpaka akajipa*”⁵⁰ Girls, dancing, discos and concerts are irrevocably linked—when singers mention girls, they talk about meeting them at discos; “*nyinyi mabeste twende tukatike*”⁵¹, *if you like to dance then here is your chance.*” (Nameless, *Minanoki*). The aim is to make people dance, to work up the crowd, “*Mikono juu, ruka, hakuna mtu amekaa chini, wewe? wewe? wewe?*”⁵² (Jua Kali, *Ruka*); “*can you feel this front to the rear can you feel this up in here*” (Nameless, *Bumba Train*).

Another recurring theme is the performance of singers, and their appeal for respect and for people to listen to their songs. Kalamashaka consider themselves thus:

wagundue tuko fit, first position

let them discover that we are the best, first position

⁴⁸ Why was I born? It is a lesson from God, I suffer and that is why I complain. You put me in this world, I have fought but you have not yet made it clear to me.

⁴⁹ If you are a girl from Nairobi, get up and dance. In the whole of Kenya, there are no ‘babes’ like here in Nairobi. Guys today, you are awake.

⁵⁰ Look at how Monalisa moves her body. Me, I look on in stunned silence; men ask everyday what it takes to get her.

⁵¹ Hey buddies, let’s go dance.

⁵² Wave your arms up in the air, nobody seated; what about you, you and you?

hee waambie wanadhani ni mchezo
hee! Tell them they think it's a game

mazee imefika position ya kushika mashati wazee
Eh men! It has reached the point where you'll become a thug

Nameless asks for respect saying “Nameless, *hatucheki na watu*”⁵³ In their song *Tukishika Microphone*, the ensemble of Nairobi All Stars⁵⁴ also show a tendency towards speaking of their songs and attracting attention. Mashifta combine most of the themes, be they militant or not, in one song, and the result is “*Pesa, pombe, siasa na wanawake inafanya wanaume wauane*”⁵⁵. In such messages, there is evidence of similarities in a new style of song. These songs have numerous dedications: to friends, to other singers; Nameless even acknowledges his producers, Ogopa DJs. The slogans in the rap are also many, and a few will be considered here. *Shasema* (literally ‘already said’) is a form of emphasising on an earlier cited message; *pamoja* (together) focuses on the importance of unity; *roho juu* (uplifted spirits) is an encouragement slogan; *sikia* (listen) and *ogopa* (be fearful) are all means of attracting attention; *jeshi* (army) indicated the importance of being one, of being organised and forming a counter power; *fungua macho* (open your eyes) appeals to people to recognise reality and to beware of superficial appearances.

Whereas Kalamashaka, the Mau Mau Camp and Gidi Gidi Maji Maji have proved great creativity in their lyrics with metaphors, play on words and historic references as pioneers in the hip-hop culture, today, there are some new-comers who seem to sing without conviction or cultural belonging.

In comparison with international hip-hop, the themes evoked in Kenyan rap are quite similar to rap in general. Kenyan militant hip-hop is by nature rather ‘polite’ and even in situations where strongly critical language is used, it remains ‘correct’ or non-abusive. The message is harsh even if the words used are not. This concerns not only rap lyrics, but more generally, the youth. Indeed, in Kenyan rap, there are rarely obscenities or insults. Kenyan rap shows more respect for family and for women than Western rap does.

⁵³ Nameless is serious about business.

⁵⁴ Nairobi All Stars is a group composed of Nazizi and Wyre of Necessary Noise; Kamau of Kalamashaka, and K-South.

⁵⁵ Money, alcohol, politics and women cause men to kill each other.

Conclusion

Hip-hop originating from the United States is spread in Africa and the whole world as an international movement, not in the arts, but also as a vector for transfer of ideas. Hip-hop rapidly took hold in East Africa. Mainly in Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi, it must be recognised as an indispensable cultural element in understanding a section of the urban youth. In Nairobi, the pioneers of the hip-hop movement are Kalamashaka and K-South. These groups basically forged their ideas on the Black American movement that considered Africa as their mythical motherland. Hip-hop in Nairobi has been largely reformulated over the last few years, but it is in street groups that hip-hop exhibits a musical flow, a flow of ideas, a conduit, and a message directed towards the entire population. Hip-hop in Kenya is divided into two types—hip-hop that transmits ideas and demands, and the more commercial hip-hop that has no serious message. Where Kalamashaka describe Africa's problems, (*Afrika hakuna matata basi mashaka*⁵⁶) *Nonini talks of Nairobi's seductive females (Manzi wa Nairobi)*. In this manner, several views of hip-hop are evident. Some consider it a means of expression and others still consider it as fun, or a means to become famous or to make a bit of money.

As the hip-hop movement becomes international, will it cause unity? Considered as a culture by those who identify with it, will hip-hop that currently affects the young generation aged between 12 to 25–30 years transfer to the new generation? Is it a temporary movement, a mode associated with youth and which parents do not want to pass on to their children, or will it be one of the major movements of the 21st century?

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⁵⁶ In Africa there are no problems, but there are troubles.

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ANNEXES

Fanya Mambo by Kalamashaka

Refrain:

Fanya mambo kwa wasee wangu wa mtaa
Do something for my street friends

Fanya mambo kwa wasee tuna hustle nao
Organise something for my people with whom I hustle

Tunafanya mambo hatuna wasi wasi
We do something, we are not suspicious

Project bado hapa ni wakati
It is still time for the project here.

Verse 1

Ki Keyser Soze mnitafutie mnikose
Like Keyser Soze⁵⁷, you look for me and you don't find me

Nairobi kipindi niongoze, nipate shillingi niose
In Nairobi, I will be the best; I will get money and be rich

halafu nisote, mpaka nikope
And after that, I will be poor and will have to borrow

filiska ki Karubandika
become bankrupt like Karubandika⁵⁸

pombe niombe, ishi nyumba karatasi matope
I beg for beers, I live in a house made of paper and mud

na bundle ndoto niote ishi kote pata yote
in most of my dreams, I live everywhere and get everything

heshimiwa na wote kufuata ndoto

⁵⁷ Main actor in the film *Usual Suspect*.

⁵⁸ Orchestra Karubandika (Maquis original), of Nairobi.

I am respected by all, I follow the dream

nawaza, mashairi vitabu najaza

I think, I fill books with poems

baadaye shika kipaza

after that, I take hold of the microphone

rebel ki-panther, wanashika tamaa wanawaza

people envy rebels like Black Panthers, and think about them

watu wakijikaza kwenye vitanda mlililaza

when people are taking drugs, you are in bed resting

kwa sasa nijitolee mhanga

now, I will be a sacrifice

kubeba binduki mkuki mapanga

I will carry guns, spears, machetes

kila sehemu kuweka nanga

we anchor ourselves everywhere

mwanaume ana vision

a man with a vision

muziki huwa na mission

music has got a mission

sio competition lakini wakati tu compete

it's not a competition but this time we compete

wagundue tuko fit first position.

for them to discover that we are the best, first position

hee waambie wanadhani ni mchezo

hee! Tell them the truth, they think it's a game

mazee imefika position ya kushika mashati maze

Eh men! It has got to a point where you'll become a thug

hakuna kucheza ni mambo nakufanya mambo

we don't play around, it's serious and we mean business

Refrain

Verse 2

Uko tayari aha !Mko tayari aha!

Are you ready, aha! are you all ready ?

O wasee natia raundi na akili imekofa gazi njaani mbaya

hee man! I'm going for a walk and my brain is poor as I starve

bila due ukiwa mbali sana na Jevanjee Gardens

without a car, very far from Jeevanjee Gardens

nikikufa kwenye hii kazi tafadhali mama yangu mtapatia hii ganji

If I die in this job, please, give this money to my mum

usiweke jina kwenye flyers ama poster kama hunikanji
Don't put my name on flyers or posters if you don't pay me

wee ngoja ili usije ukaharibu the program
hey you! wait so that you don't spoil the programme

tafadhali soma dibaji ya vipindi
please read the line-up of the programme

unafikiriaje kuleta cast ya vitimbi
what do you think of bringing the cast of Vitimbi

eh ehe kwenye matanga, maisha enyewe ni changa
at the funeral, life itself is negligible

changa panga vile utakanga halafu manga
collect money, plan as you'd like, then eat

tafadhali ficha panga
but please hide the machete

mafikira zikianza jo kutanga tanga
yah man! when ideas start to come, get moving

Fanya mambo
Do something

Verse 3

heyo nyakati ndiyo hizi
hey ! now is the time

zile mizizi zilipandwa na mababu zetu
those roots that were planted by our ancestors

jo ndiyo hizi zimemea
look, here they are, they have sprouted

naendelea kufanya hii muziki kukanya emcee
I go on with my music, warn the master of ceremonies

kusakanya ni riziki
to look for bread is a daily need

hamjamboni wote ?
how are you everybody ?

jina langu si Kingosi lakini naipenda shillingi
My name is not Kingosi but I like money

na wala si Onyango lakini naipenda samaki
neither is it Onyango, but I like fish

naipenda kushika mic na kuongea kuhusu haki
I like to grab the microphone and to speak about justice

naipenda mishikaki, randa na haki, kuacha jina

I like kebabs, act with justice, become famous

kwa vitabu za historia mpaka Argentina
in books of History up to Argentina

utaiskia si tunavunja mguu
you will hear of it, we break legs

njia nyingi za poteza njia
there are many ways of losing the correct path

ulipoteza ukijaribu kuongea sana
you lost the path when you tried to speak too much

kuongea mbaya kunihusu, hivo ndiyo Judas alimbusu Jesus Christ,
to speak badly about me, that's how Judas kissed Jesus Christ

hata ukunywe sprite ile thirst iko ndani yangu ni mkubwa sana
even if you drink Sprite, the thirst inside is still very big

nimechoka kukaa na kutazama mnitazama
I'm tired of sitting and staring as you look at me.

Folk poetry as a weapon of struggle: an analysis of the Chaka Mchaka resistance songs of the national resistance movement/ army of Uganda

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Introduction

This paper recapitulates on the NRM/A resistance songs. It examines and analyses their structure and content with a view to showing how they facilitated transmission of the movement's political programme and the organizing ideology.

The argument initiated here is that in predominantly rural societies, songs constitute a salient medium through which organised resistance can transmit its political education to winning hearts and minds. Songs also constitute a medium through which the critics of the regime and social forces across class, ethnic and educational divides are united. The Ugandan process demonstrates the fact that conscience of peasants can be aroused to the extent that their mode of existence is appreciated and appropriated with a view to facilitating cultural transformation.

Sung in different places, using different tunes and under diverse circumstances, songs can serve as an alternative medium for transmitting culture of resistance transformation and as a counter to ruling elite propaganda and marginalization. In the case of Uganda, songs constituted a critical component of Uganda's struggle for a new national culture of social development.

Resistance process and mobilisation

By its very nature, guerrilla warfare is a strategy commonly adopted by popular forces fighting a repressive regime. These forces are often disadvantaged by human and material resources. To counter its sublime poverty, the resistance leadership is forced to re rank elements *sine qua non* to achieving their intended objectives. For starters, the leadership must evolve a clear cause on whose basis the objective of the war is evolved. It must also have a good grasp of laws that have guided similar wars in other historical epochs, master their characteristics while eschewing mechanistic approaches⁵⁹. It must also familiarise itself with the enemy's as well as its own situation. Any subsequent actions undertaken by the resistance must factor in these issues in its calculation. The theory of resistance on which the resistance process is constructed is conceptualised around this understanding.

A theory of resistance is critical in enabling the leadership to avoid costly adventures while enabling guerrillas to gain time. In this case, time is a variable critical to facilitating the capture and consolidation of the resistance's control over space. The latter is critical for engendering organization, development of political and military leadership and the undermining of the tangible and intangible centres of gravity of the enemy. For resistance groups, time and space are dialectical, mutually reinforcing and crucial for the survival of the entire process. The war is only winnable to the extent that it is protracted. Yet protracted wars are a function of popular support which must be nurtured. Political education is core to the development of popular support. It seeks to provide critical knowledge about the political economy and social issues around which state politics is woven.

More importantly, it is critical to evolving political consciousness especially where little exists. Indeed once political consciousness is achieved, resistance leadership tends to use it to erode the congruence between the prevailing parochial and subjective cultures and totalitarianism. Parochial cultures are sustained by repressive regimes through the evolution of thin and thick versions of false consciousness. While the former not only camouflages but also rationalises exclusion

⁵⁹ *Selected works of Mao Tse-tung*. 'Strategic problems of China's Revolutionary War', vol. 1, p. 248. (New York, 1954).

along ethnic lines, the latter seeks to paralyze society with the so-called consequences likely to befall those who contemplate revolt.

Reinforced by ignorance and fear of the military might of the state, peasants become blinded by their common plight and from the need for unity. They instead bow to the oppressor in a stony calm. The converse is the case for the enemy. It is this that engenders what la Boétie (1995) refers to as voluntary servitude. Political education in this sense constitutes the substructure of a successful resistance process. It is indeed *sine qua non* to mobilisation. The latter entails the process of creating favourable conditions for peasant support. Such support includes the provision of food, information, shelter and human resource elements. It provokes conditions within which guerrillas are able to swarm in favourable temperatures within the society.

While every guerrilla fighter is in principle engaged in the mobilisation process, in reality organised groups tend to also set aside units of cadres specifically trained to undertake this. Their core role becomes that of explaining the objectives of the war, the expectations of the society with respect to guerrillas and putting peasant support into context. Mobilisation is a continuous activity whose tactics are context-specific. It demands a committed leadership that avoids aloofness while evolving alternative modes of reaching out to the society. Correct arguments for convincing peasants must be formulated not from the abstract understanding of social issues, but from the objective intimate knowledge of local habits, language, hopes and fears⁶⁰.

Each guerrilla struggle evolves its own methods of imparting political education consequent to evaluation of the society in question. In predominantly rural societies, the modes adopted include traditional paroles, symbols, scripts and poetics. These are adopted in songs and dances. To structure and facilitate mobilisation through songs, movements need an organizing space they can control. In the case of rural-based resistance in Uganda, the method used was constructed around the *Chaka Mchaka*.

With roots in Tanzania, *Chaka Mchaka* entailed the process of assembling social forces in select social spaces. This included the access

⁶⁰ See Katumanga M, *Leadership, organisation et prise du pouvoir: les causes du succès des mouvements de Résistance en Ouganda et au Rwanda (1981–2000)*.

to military exercises, political education (on history, economy and social issues) constructed around songs, folklore and poetics. In the case of Uganda, the peasants were taught aspects of popular struggles in a bid to contextualise their support.

Underlying the use of music was the fact that it not only permeates the predominantly oral societies but also its centrality in the existential realities of Africans. It constitutes an integral part of dances, entertainment, religious ceremonies, rites of passage, death and marriages. Within the body of resistance, what is considered music are songs of praise, critique of authority and narratives of communal history. Music acts as a barometer for determining happiness, tribulation, mourning, defiance, supplication and education.

In the resistance context, songs are an expression of what Germans call *Zeitgeist*: the sum of thoughts, attitudes, striving, drive and living forces of the people, expressing themselves on given causes and effects in a definite course of events.⁶¹ As Herder notes, in oral societies, music is the first of the arts by which every mind is moved. It speaks to every heart. Together with dance, it constitutes nature's general festival throughout the earth. Through music, a people's character manifests⁶² the natural, the cultural and the reality in which participants of the struggles were immersed. The success of music as a medium for mobilisation lies in the fact that the forms used are antithetical to the technocratic problem-solving stance adopted by extension officers. These tend to take a distance from reality, which they opt to analyse and compartmentalise before devising means for solving difficulties. They also tend to dictate the strategy or policy to be adopted.

To understand the role of songs in the mobilisation process, an analysis of the music (sounds), the behaviour (performance), the ideas⁶³ and the meaning carried by the two is required. Mobilisation songs are by nature collective folk poetry. Folk poetry is a genre which precedes and is antithetical to the poetry of art. It is composed collectively of the people. Most of these songs did not have fixed texts, an element that

⁶¹ Pongweni, A.J.C. (1982). *Songs that won the Liberation war*. The College Press, Harare, p. 11.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. iv.

⁶³ Mariam Alan P. (1964). *The Anthropology of Music*. Evanston Northwestern University Press.

allowed adaptation, spontaneity and improvisation in various contexts. What remains constant is the structure. Improvisation and adaptation on the other hand, suscitates mental labour at individual level, thus pushing commitment to the struggle a notch higher. More notable is the fact that ideas on the song are not owned by an individual but are shared. It is this construction of sharing that transformed the resistance poetics into a popular rational culture of resistance. Expressions of a community of ideas, feelings and hopes of a collective polity are found within their structure and content hence, the concept of a folk poetry. Resistance folk poetry also points to the level of a group development, hopes and aspirations. They assert collective dignity of the oppressed and their legitimate right to resist repression and chart out their own destiny. Folk poetry eventually points to different modes of consciousness. Indeed, local languages can not only unite differentiated social classes but also act as media through which national issues are examined, analysed, and innovative options suggested. Songs allow resistance forces to easily counter state dominance over radio. They carry patterns of meaning that are expressed through performances and symbolic forms such as dance and utterance. Through these forms, individuals communicate the ideology of the resistance, criticise state violence while sharing experiences of the struggle from one point to another.⁶⁴

Performance of music also facilitates communication of normative concepts of the resistance. Through music, resistance movements not only show what is 'normal', what needs to be strived for and why, but also what should be rejected and the underlying reasons for the rejection. Other than the aspect of performance, there is also the element Sieber (1959) refers to as unvoiced aesthetic to describe the behavioural approach to performance. This refers to the appreciation of accuracy and appropriateness that is not given verbal expression, but is nonetheless understood by participants in artistic events. Through music and dance, the resistance movements transmit other unexpressed values of comradeship such as sacrifice, commitment to struggle, rupture from the practice of politics as performed by the state leadership and the aspiration for an ideal future.

What Turner calls processional symbolic analysis which concerns

⁶⁴ Katumanga M, *op. cit.*

itself with interpretation of meaning of symbols, their role as signifiers of changing modes signification in temporal socio-cultural processes is also deciphered.⁶⁵ The modes of dance performed by combatants is salient in terms of boosting morale, preparing troops for combat or taking them through exercise paces.

Additionally, songs carry the summarized content of the resistance programmes. They also use the movement's organising ideology to engender the internalisation of last sacrifices of others and acceptance of the same. In other words, they return a wide level of ceremonial aspects that cement certain interrelations before evolving as structures tying together various combatants. Each song seeks to facilitate a certain function at the different times it is sung. There were songs aimed at lifting morale of troops after combat, for entertainment, for political education, for re-dedication to the cause and for marching to battle.

The NRM model succeeded because the problematic of the war was poetized to the extent of allowing (il)literate populations to participate at individual and collective levels in its de-codification and in the process, the comprehension of the total reality. The process is phenomenological. It is operated through a Socratic process that allows peasants to discover the 'truth' both mentally and through their own experience. It is this process that animates consciousness, focalizes relations with nature (order of things) while ensuring that social forces are eventually grasped and deconstructed. Participants are consequently thrust into dialogue with others thus animating the transformation process. Any success of the process is pegged on music creating a relationship among those who listen and the world.⁶⁶

Underlying this, is the fact that despite its being sung in different spaces, the element of connectivity through meaning and purpose is not left out. It equally creates the element of temporariness. Participants are made to transcend their single dimensionality. Songs with a narrative logic allow participants to reach back into the past and connect the message to the present. Those with a closure message allow participants to question and recognise their contemporary reality while those with a problem-solving logic allow actors to engage the future.

⁶⁵ Turner Victor (1977). 'Process, system and symbol. A new anthropological synthesis', *Dalldalus* 106 (3): 61–80.

⁶⁶ Katumanga, *op. cit.*

This dimensionality of music, thoughts and emotions reinforces consciousness that builds up a history of the participants. It also confirms their existence as one with nature and with the capacity to communicate, make choices and engage in transformation of their existential reality. This capacity facilitates the integration of individual peasants in the emerging community of 'rebels', a process that permits exit from the state and the existence of contested sovereignty situation.

It is this process that transforms peasants from mere objects to subjects capable of responding challenges from the environment. Instead of accepting reality as a given, the continuous process of teaching through songs facilitates acquisition of attitudes, beliefs, information and judgment that animates cognitive, affective and evaluational orientation in the process forcing change in the existing political culture. Such a culture constitutes a fertile base for mobilizing ideologies. They help render the peasantry a dynamic group, enabling them to master their own reality and to seek its transformation. In the process, they add a temporal meaning to the organizing space. They create a new culture of resistance of doing things in the space. They become innovative and creative, eventually impacting on their epochs. In resistance songs, the elements core to historical epochs such as aspirations, concerns, sought out values (through being and behaving) become discernible.

Songs also contain symbolic representations of obstacles to be surmounted. Construction of music for mobilisation pre-supposes organised, innovative leadership versed in the mechanics of ideological constructions. The aim here is to create beliefs and myths that converge to explain the social reality. Ideology assumes a multiplier effect on the other elements. In parochial cultures, the need to re-interpret the role of religion, politics, morality and art and science is a given. Ideology here must be present in the political programme articulated through songs. It must aspire to transform while seeking to conceal the constructions of new modes of subordination. Its meaning must be mobilised to conceal modes of social relations. The mastery and use of wide ranges of ideological constructions is imperative. These tend to create a sort of ideological toolkit. Each ideological (spanner) construct is used to handle a specific task. There are songs which apply ideological constructions on polemical lines. These aim at critiquing existing organising ideologies with the view to exposing their contribution to the nation state crisis.

Through this construct, armed struggle is rationalised as inevitable. Equally important is the use of the strategy of displacement. The poetics used here are constructed using a political language and vocabulary that can be easily understood by supporters. For instance, the use of terms such as 'backward elements' in reference to regime leadership (for its ethnic bias tendencies) are used with the view to denigrating and de-legitimising them. In Uganda for instance, metaphors were used to depict the society as sick, and in need of specialised treatment from political doctors, who could only be found in the resistance. This ensured that peasants were able to relate to and connect with various elements of the reality.

Unification constructions were also used in songs with the objective of promoting a unity of purpose among various groups initially differentiated by false consciousness. In Uganda, the Kiswahili language traditionally associated with regime repression was adopted and used as a medium of resistance songs thus helping to achieve unity across class, academic and ethnic divide.

In this sense, music-driven ideological constructs, play four core roles.

1. Songs facilitate the critiquing of the existing reality at personal and collective levels.
2. They help to highlight, pinpoint and particularise individual acts on which social crisis is attributed.
3. Through songs, the vision of alternative social constructions is provided. Songs carry within them images of blurred present and idealistic future to be aspired for.
4. They spawn the creation of a community in the process bringing together groups that seek to revolt, motivating them to risk their lives and property in the quest for a new order. The ideological construction animates and instrumentalises the use of violence in addition to identifying the actual targets for the latter.

The success of resistance music lies in its symbolically appealing melodies that exhort and encourage sacrifice in order to root out relative and decrementing deprivation. An analysis of resistance songs indicates a structure that binds not only ideas but also the ideology of

the movement. What cannot be easily transmitted through paper and pen are transferred through song. Notably they offer a clear option for understanding not only what the resistance is about but also what the host society's opinion of the movement. This is the case when for instance they openly identify with and even master the songs in question. More importantly, given the ease with which songs are learned and the uniformity with which various groups participate in their enactment, movements are able to foster unity.

Examinations of form, content and performance practice of NRM songs define several types of folk poetics:

Narrative Poetics: These relate not only a complete story over a period of time but also pass meaning through hidden scripts. The narration is in form of descriptions that take advantage of ideological modes of constructions to achieve a wide range of objectives such as de-legitimisation of the enemy and mystification of the guerrillas. In these songs, the story is segmented in a succession of clear, distinct pictures by use of distinct issues that appear separate yet are united in logic. One is compelled to listen to them from beginning to end in order to understand the story. They are constructed to entertain through humour and to elicit participation through two clear parts. The first is narrated by the soloist; the rest of the troupe responds through actions that exhort people to understand why.

Fixed Chorus type: This is a repetitive type of poetics. Composed lines are repeated in the chorus and by the soloist. The objective is to pass on specific political education messages.

Mosaics: These comprise a mixture of patterns. There are fixed scripts that were sung by the soloist with a chorus that drew content from a fixed script. However, the soloist could also include other improvised scripts, and modify the modes within which the melody was delivered. They gave messages and boosted morale. Mosaics prepared the soldiers psychologically as they marched towards the battlefield. In this category were polite march, mobilisation and political education songs.

The analysis of Ugandan resistance through songs is taken from this (aforementioned) perspective. Using resistance songs, modes of mobilisation, ideological constructions, message and perceived aim of

resistance are analysed in an attempt towards a better comprehension. The consequent impact of the songs on the resistance process is also evaluated. The argument here is that songs offer a medium through which lower echelons of society are able to forge a sense of integration, interaction and eventually equanimity with the elite. This process engenders a unity of purpose critical to entrenching the resistance.

Mosaic Types

KINO KYE KISEERA (TIME HAS COME)

*Kino kye kiseeraffe tulina okuiwana,
mubiseera ebyomumaso tufune emilembe*

*Kino kye kiseera mwetulwanira, tuiwanire eggwanga
Lifune emirembe*

*Kino kye kiseera ffe mwetulwanira, tulwanirire eggwanga
Liwone aniagombe*

*Nze bwembala mu mwaka gigenda mwasatu
Tetulya ffe tetunywa netutokomoka, nfa nza*

*Temudirira abe mikwano banange mugume masajja ffe
Tulina obuwanguzi
Aboluganda abemikwano bannange mukwate amafumu awamu
Nemiggo maama*

*Tugoberere Museveni banange, Tulwanirire eggwanga
Lifune emirembe
Aboluganda abemikwano kyengamba
Munywee amafumu awamu nemiggo, maama*

*Tugoberere muzeeyi (mzee) banange, tulwanirire
Eggwanga liwone amagombe
Twasulanga bweru mu tale mu nsiko
Nga go gasula munyumba ffe zetwaleka etayo*

*Kino kyekiseera ffe mwetulwanira, tulwanirire eggwanga
Lifune emirembe
Kino kyekiseera ffe mwetulwanira, tulwanire eggwanga
Liwone amagombe*

*Kino kyekiseera ffe mwetulwanira, tuiwanirire eggwanga
Lifune emirembe
Gasajja gatujogga ne gatufukira ensolo, gatulya nga
Tulaba nga tewali na nduulu*

*Gatulya nga tulaba nga tewali na nduulu, nga tewali
Nakwogera nga tewali nabuuza*

*Gali gatemu nno nga galinga ensolo, gatu sombera
Katuusa mu Uganda yaffe*

*Afande Rwigyema Fred matudumira, nti zizo muziwambe
Musirete gyembeera, maama
Abaana nebalwana nga balasa ku nyama, ne tuwamba
Katuusa ne zirwasa mayinja*

*Twabalekayo abazadde nenganda ne tweyiwa ensi ffeno
Lwakunoonya kuddembe
Ne tubalekayo abakyala nabaana, ne tweyuna ensiko nti
Lwakuyigga ku ddembe*

*Temutenenya ku nga tetunadda, tukyali mu lutaalo
Olwokunoonya Lakwena
Kino kye kiseeraffe mwetulwanira, tulwanirire eggwanga
Lifune emirembe*

*Gali gatemu nnyo nga galinda ensolo, gatusombera katuusa
Mu Uganda yaffe
Abana nebalwana nga balasa ky nyama, netuwamba
Katuusa ne zirwaza mayinja*

*Ffe twabalekayo abasadde nenganda, netweyiwa ensi ffe
Nti lwakunonya ku ddembe
Ffe temutunenya kuba tetunadda tukyali mulutalo
Olwokukwata Lakwena.*

THE TIME HAS COME

This is the time for us to fight so that we can have peace and freedom
in future x 2

Let's fight and fight for the whole country to get peace
AU friends don't give up, let's chase way these beasts to get our relief

If I count 23 years we haven't been eating or drinking well
only to die massively. Soldiers and leaders misused us
and turned us against each other. These beasts have been eating
us without any alarm or help. They could kill us without any warning.
All friends and relatives let's get spears, clubs and what we can
to fight these bad people. Let us follow Museveni, let's fight for our country
from murders and darkness to peace.

We used to sleep outside we used to sleep outside
in the jungles when our abandoned homes were
occupied by these beasts. They brought deadly weapons
in this country and like beasts they sought to devour us.
Afande Rwigyema Fred commanded us to fight and defeat these beasts.

Even our women fought hard and killed many of these beasts
And we conquered them with their deadly weapons.
Relatives friends, let's pick spears and guns to fight.

Let's follow mzee and fight for our country
to bring it out of bloodshed and darkness

This song was sung during route marches and sometimes on parades or as a prelude to the *vipindi vya siasa* (political awareness programmes). The first salient aspect in these songs was the unification process through appeals to fraternal links for the liberation of the whole country and to the collective suffering of the entire society at the hands of what the NRA referred to as beasts. The reference to the government soldiers as beasts was an expurgatory process aimed at drawing a distinction between the good people—the victims—and the bad ones. There is the legitimisation of armed struggle and the rationalising of the use of violence by brothers, sisters and parents against blood-letting beasts of darkness. The society is exhorted to unite to sacrifice in order to harvest peace in future.

In a dissimulator process, they are exhorted to unite under the old man (a metaphorical reference to the wisdom of Yoweri Museveni). The song extols the combatants to get together and fight without fear of the 'beasts' in order to bring peace to Uganda. Through narrative, the 23 years of suffering are brought to the fore through depictions, in order to produce collectivization of the polity. Unity in suffering must be transcended by unity of purpose to overcome. It is for this reason that the struggle is dignified. There is also a concerted attempt to exhort others to stand up and fight taking the example of pan-Africanist Rwandese combatants like Fred Rwigyema, who sacrificed for the sake of Uganda. The hidden script here seeks to bring out the fact that the struggle is universal and that it is not ethnic. Thirdly, the aim here is to show that struggles are all about sacrifice, hence the presence of non-Ugandans whose role has no price on it other than the cost of peace.

ENDESHENI MAPAMBANO

(CONDUCT THE STRUGGLE)

Songeni, songeni mama songeni

Advance, advance, mothers advance

Songeni, Songeni tujenge Uganda mpya Advance, advance let us build a new Uganda

Wananchi wa Uganda

Citizens of Uganda

Refrain

Refrain

Endesheni Mapambano

Conduct the struggle

Tuteketeze jeshi la Obote

Let us burn down Obote's army

Tujenge Uganda Mpya

and build a new Uganda

Fukuzeni Smith Huyo

Chase away that Smith

(refrain)

(refrain)

Wananchi wa Uganda

Citizens of Uganda

(refrain)

(refrain)

Fukuzeni Obote huyo

Chase away that Obote

(refrain)

(refrain)

Fukuzeni Ojoka huyo

Chase out that Ojok

(refrain)

(refrain)

Fukuzeni Rwakasisi huyo

Chase out that Rwakasisi

(refrain)

(refrain)

Fukuzeni ukabila

Chase out tribalism

(refrain)

(refrain)

This song was sung by combatants as they advanced towards the Front. The lead soloist makes specific requests to the combatants and to Ugandan citizens (destroy Obote's army, chase away his henchmen, and fight against ethnicity). The rest collectively respond in a chorus *Songeni mama Songeni* (advance, mother advance). The evocation 'mother'⁶⁷ collectively by all combatants provided an adhesive emotive factor in a fragmented setting. At ideology level, such an evocation had the net effect of creating an image around which standardization was created, in the process engendering symbolic exchanges. The other elements of symbolic unification are invoked through exhortation of Ugandan citizens to unite in the struggle and advance on their common enemies. These are identified as Milton Obote, Oyite Ojok, Smith Opon and Rwakasisi Chris. The aim here is to construct these actors as the main obstacles. From an ideological point of view, they can be identified as the cause of the problem. Their elimination is rationalized as *sine qua non* to the success of the struggle. In other words, in portraying these individuals as a centre of convergence, a community of resisters is effectively created.

These actors are symbolically purged through the word *fukuzeni*—chase away. Chasing is an ideological simulation of what happens to bad elements or wild animals. They are chased away from the community for breaking taboos, or for endangering lives respectively.

⁶⁷ Among East African communities, the element of one's mother is always evoked at point of death or pain.

There is a clear attempt at ideological fragmentation through which the NRA sought to maintain its invincibility. In this case it is by the attempt to portray Obote as being in power because of his army. This is considered the only road block hindering the construction of the new Uganda. Here, they call for burning it to ashes (*tuteketeze jeshi la Obote*). Burning, as used here, is a term whose objective is to expurgate these people by evoking negative images about them. This is done through a latent process of turning people's minds towards daily religious and traditional narrative in which evil is conquered through fire which burns them to ashes as it purifies the good ones. In this sense, the good will build a new Uganda.

Fixed Line Folklores

TUNASONGA BADO

NRA nipe Uwezo,
 Nikomboe Uganda na wananchi wote
 Na Kabamba nilisongaaaah?
 Na Kiboga Niiisongaaaah
 Masaka nilifikaaaaah
 Na Mpigi nikalalaaaah
 Katonga nihipataaaaah
 Kampala nitafikaaaah
 Na Jinja nitasonga
 Soroti nikaendaaaah
 Hoima nikafika
 Masindi nilifanya
 Apatch nitafika
 Entebbe nitasonga
 Arua nitafika

Chorus

Nitafika na siasa nzuri na mtutu wangu

WE WILL CONTINUE ADVANCING

NRA give me the capacity (ability)
 to liberate Uganda and its people
 In Kabamba I moved in
 And in Kiboga I moved in
 Masaka I reached
 In Mpigi I slept
 Katonga (bridge) I passed
 Kampala I shall move there
 And Jinja I shall move there
 Soroti I will go there
 Hoima I reached
 Masindi I did my duty
 Apatch I shall reach
 Entebbe I will move there
 Arua I will reach

Chorus

I will reach with the right political line

When analysed within its Kiswahili context, *nitasonga* (I will move/advance) takes a definitive sense of a vow to do a duty or rally to a patriotic call. Here it refers to the liberation of Uganda. The various towns mentioned are euphemisms for various nationalities that inhabit these towns. It is these that pre-emphasises the nationalistic content of the struggle. Through a narrative process, the starting point of the

struggle in Kabamba is evoked. The song expresses a vow to reach Soroti in the east and Apatch in the north. This vow, though distant at the time of the struggle, is made to seem achievable, distance and obstacles notwithstanding, just as the 27 armed men entered the Kabamba Military Training School and chased away TPDF and a battalion of four trainers. Difficulties are acknowledged here, not as a historical event but a reminder that difficulties and obstacles are surmountable. If anybody seemed to doubt this fact, *Katonga nilipita*⁶⁸ (*Katonga I passed*). *Entebbe nitasonga* (Entebbe I will move in) *Kampala nitafika* (Kampala I shall reach) indicates not only determination but a vow, a finality of what will happen. The song then reaffirms the fact that all these factors are achievable courtesy of NRA giving the (peasant) fighter the capacity and knowledge of military science and the gun at one level and the correct political line *viz*, an ideological position that shuns sectionalism, ethnically-based fragmentation and which instead calls for national unity. Here, metaphorical reference to NRA's leadership, military superiority is evoked to rally combatants in its invincibility. This advantage is reinforced by its correct political line. The others, by reference, will fail because of the incorrectness of their politics and lack of military science. This is an exemplification of the process of expurgation in which the peasant is made to believe in the inevitability of victory through song and a language he understands.

SIO MAFEDHA

Refrain:

Ni jembe tuu sio mafedha
Yaleta uchumi hapa Uganda
Hata na kombati
Oo hata silaha zetu
Ooh kweli kweli
Ooh kweli kumbe
Hata gari
Hata mabati
Hata mikanda
Hata na radio
Hata viatu
Hata sokisi
Ooh kweli kumbe
Ooh kumbe ndugu
Ooh kweli jeshi
Ooh kweli mama

IT IS NOT FOREIGN AID

It is merely the *jembe* not foreign aid
that builds the economy here in Uganda
even one combat
even one of our arms
ooh truly truly
ooh so its true
even vehicles
even iron sheets
even belts
and even radios
and even shoes
and even socks
ooh truly that is the truth
that is the reality my brother
that is the reality army
that is the reality mother

⁶⁸ Katonga here refers to the famous bridge around which the backbone of the UNLA was broken. It was one of the most difficult obstacles in the struggle.

Hata ndege zetu
Hata na vitabu
Hata kujijenga
Ooh hata RPG
Hata na misilo
Hata na mishara
Hata na viwanda
Hata nabarabara
Ooh hata shule nzuri
Ooh hata kahawa yetu

even our planes
 even books
 even self development
 and even the RPG
 even the missiles
 even the salary
 even the industries
 even roads
 and even good schools
 and even our coffee

Through song, the politics of underdevelopment in Uganda, and the failure of nation state building are also brought out to the peasant. A Kiswahili song, *Sio mafedha* (it is not foreign aid), sang during what was called *Vipindi vya siasa* (political programme) conveyed political economy teachings to the peasants. The song emphasized the centrality of the peasant's *jembe* (tool used for farming by peasants). In so doing, it sought to elevate the pride of the peasant in himself and fighters thus regaining his dignity. Parallel to this was the process of instilling in the combatant the value of respect the peasant, for out of his symbolic tools and sweat, emerged the gun the soldier carries. This song sought to legitimize the NRA struggle and euphemism that elevated the *Jembe*, thus placing the peasant in direct conflict with the predatory anti-peasant culture that was prevalent among regime elite and soldiers. If a *jembe* is the source of all the wealth in Uganda, then the poverty experienced by peasants is a direct consequence of bad politics, caused by bad elements. Notably, it is this rationale to struggle to defeat them and capitalise on the wealth created by the *jembe*.

The following song is a rallying call for unity.

Wanachama wa NRM, wazalendo wa Uganda
Wote tuungane mikono, tujenge Uganda
Hiyo kazi itakuwa rahisi sana, kujenga nchi yetu
 All followers of NRM, patriots of Uganda
 Let us all join hands, to build our Uganda
 This work will be very easy, to build a nation

Tunatakiwa tuwe pamoja, tulete amani
Ikiwa nifisi ya kweni, ikiwa ni fisi ya mbali
Nakweli tufukuze hizo fisi zote tujenge nchi
 We are impressed upon to unite to bring peace
 Whether it is the hyena from your home or from outside
 It is truly imperative that we should chase away those hyenas to build our nation

Uganda yetu itakuwa mpya tupate uhuru
Wabeberu wa zamani walitudharau
Waliiba mali yetu, nakuleta umasikini
Sasa nao wote waliondoka na kuwacha nchi yetu
Tukifuata waliondoka na kuwacha nchi
Our Uganda will re-emerge for us to enjoy our freedom
Colonialists looked down on us
They stole our wealth and brought about poverty
Now they all left and left our country
As we followed their bad habits they left the country

Itakufa wanafunzi wa Uganda, walimaji wa Uganda
Na wafanyi kazi wote, tujenge taifa letu
Wananchi wamechoka kwa mauzuni na kuteseka
Tufukuzeni wafanya makosa tujenge Uganda

Students, farmers and workers of Uganda
Let us build our nation together
Our citizens are tired of suffering and being tortured
Let's chase away wrong doers and build Uganda

NRM's ideological constructs of unification, were also expressed through songs such as *Tuungane*. Uganda is referred to as belonging to all and the message is fight the prevalent negative logic in which corruption is rationalised and accepted. Using the example of the hyena, NRM pointed out that adverse effects are the same whether instigated from within in or outside. In the Buganda setting, the hyena is a reference to those Baganda serving in the regime. In other words, this was an organised attempt to remove them from the community, while re-orienting the peasants' perceptions on what is good for the entire community. As opposed to the fragmentation policies that stress pursuit of suboptimal interests, the song points to colonial exploitation and humiliation suffered by the African and the sustenance of this logic through misplaced values. The answer here is the adoption of a unifying programme of broad politics of NRM.

A common element in these songs is the use of images as a means of communicating a vision easily comprehensible by both the peasantry and the educated elite who are directly or indirectly involved in the struggle. Imagery is used to evolve unity of purpose among various sectors of the society differentiated by language, education and economic capacity. From the onset, the guerrilla leadership was confronted by years of social conditioning in which such social differentiation were

not only exaggerated but also sharpened. In Uganda, language can be summarised into five categories—Bantu in the west, central and much of eastern Uganda, Cushitic language in the north eastern Uganda and Sudanic languages in the north western parts of Uganda. The resistance leadership in Uganda therefore sought to maximize on the predominantly oral cultures to provide meaning to the struggle and place the Ugandan problems in context. In a bid to facilitate unification and the forging of a collective identity, the use of Kiswahili was encouraged.⁶⁹ Through it, symbolic exchanges were engendered as new identities evolved and diffused through various nationalities. Indeed, the mark of the success of NRM/A in Buganda can be measured by the acceptability of Kiswahili by peasants and combatants even though it was always associated with the regime and hence regarded as a language of repression. Kiswahili facilitated inter-ethnic communication.

In Kiswahili, similar imagery could be found and easily spread. In accepting Kiswahili, the Baganda were indirectly accepting a re-ranking of the salience of Kiganda as a language and by inference their 'chauvinism.' In the previous song, the image of a hyena is used to add value not only to the greedy predatory nature of both the colonial and post colonial regimes, but also to falsify the post-independence tendency to rationalise bad governance by African leadership⁷⁰ and its ethnic content, to the extent that it often assumes a negative but social popularity at a micro level. Corruption is rationalized as justifiable as long as the culprit is from a given ethnic group. This is despite the fact that the said corruption could be of benefit solely to one individual. The common perception is that whoever the person is, he 'eats' on behalf of the 'tribe.' The moral here is that a hyena is a hyena; it kills, exploits, it is greedy; it is bad and should be killed. The song seeks to isolate bad elements whether Baganda or Nilote.

The continuity of colonial practices of divide and rule, exclusion and societal violence were engendered by disunity among Africans. It thus suggests a collective approach that seeks to maximise on unity in diversity across class, educational and ethnic lines. Through song, Museveni as the alternative leader is thrust to the centre stage of the

⁶⁹ Bantu language most spoken in Eastern Africa.

⁷⁰ This is a common tendency all over. African leaders seek to justify and rationalize problems of governance on the account of self rule.

struggle. Despite his young age (he was in his late 30s), and despite the fact that Lule was the chairman, Museveni was referred to as Mzee (Kiswahili for old man). This was a euphemism of his capacity and knowledge, both attributes that the old are expected to possess. In this sense, such reference to him made him the true alternative to the prevailing leadership in Uganda.

NRM also sought to universalise its struggle in the Ugandan context and thus facilitate unification by seeking to show that all classes (from student to workers, peasants) and gender were involved in the struggle and made sacrifices for it. It was not strange to ask where the youth were going—the answer was that they were engaged in a struggle to liberate Uganda.

Narrative Poetics

Mama yangu auliza katoto kangu chapu katarudi lini?
My mother asks, when will my competent child return?

Kwa nini vijana wanahamiya msituni
Jifunze kwanini vijana wanahamiya msituni

Why are the youth taking to the bush?
Understand why the youth are taking to the bush

Walienda huko msituni kupigania Uhuru wetu
Walienda huko msituni kulinda mali za wananchi
Walienda huko msituni kupigania demokrasia
Wamama wetu wauliza watoto wetu watarudi lini?

They went to the bush to fight for our independence
They went to the bush to protect the property of citizens
They went to the bush to fight for democracy
Our mothers are asking when our children will return

Obote wa Uganda auliza
vijana vya Makerere walienda wapi?
Mzee wa kazi alimjiu kwamba
walihamiya msituni
Wandugu wetu wauliza wadada
Walienda huko msituni kupigania demokrasia

Obote himself is asking, where did
The Makerere university students migrate to?
The old patron answered him,
The boys have migrated to the bush
Our brothers are asking, where did our sisters go

They went to the bush to fight for democracy

*Ooh na Oyite Ojok auliza vijana chapa
wako wapi sasa?*

*Ooh na Tumuine naye akamjibu
kwamba vijana vinahamiya msituni
Ooh wandugu zetu wauliza, madada
zetu watarudi lini?*

Mama yetu anauliza mtoto yangu atarudi lini

Oo and Oyite Ogok is asking, where are the
Most capable boys now?

Oooh Tumuine answered him

The boys have migrated to the bush

Our brothers are asking when

Will our sisters return?

Our mother is asking, when will her little baby return?

This song aimed at showing the extent of collective sacrifice and the reasons for this sacrifice. The fighters left their homes to fight for democracy, the right to protection of life and property (a reference to state led predation). They had sacrificed their education to the surprise of the political leadership. The mothers have their favourite children in the struggle; fathers have sons, their brothers and sisters, who are the most capable elements of the society. However, they have to fight for liberty. The moral of the song is to remind everyone in the struggle that they are not alone and thus make the struggle bearable. Most salient was the attempt to liberate excluded and marginalized social sectors and to mobilize them for the struggle. In Uganda, these sectors included the youth and women. The NRA struggle used songs and military parades of girl soldiers to elevate the role of women in the struggle and in the process, liberate these forces.

TUPAMBANE ZAIDI (Let us intensify the struggle)

Chorus

*Oh tujifunze adui ako Uganda baado
Tujifunze, tumpambane nao, tujifunze
Tupambane zaidi tutawashinda*

Let us learn military skills, the enemy is still in Uganda

Let us learn military skills, let us fight them

Struggle with determination and effort, we shall defeat them

Mbarara tunayo wapiganaji
Na Kasese tunayo wapiganaji
Na Tororo tunayo wapiganaji
Arua piya tunayo wapiganaji
Kwa hivyo tujifunze, adui ako Uganda bado
Tujifunze tupambane nao tujifunze
Tupambane nao tutawashinda

We have fighters in Mbarara
We have fighters in Kasese
In Tororo, we also have fighters
In Arua too, we have fighters
We should therefore learn military skills the enemy is still in Uganda
We should struggle, fight him
Until we defeat him

Fort Portal tunao wapiganaji
Na Hoima tunayo wapiganaji
Na Kabale tunayo wapiganaji

We have fighters in Fort Portal
We have fighters even in Hoima
And in Kabale too, we have fighters

For the NRM/A leadership, it was not enough to educate the people on the objectives of the war alone. Given the connectivity between political and military elements, they had to understand the need for armed struggle as a tool for combating and ridding the society of bad elements. A well-trained military with a good political line was therefore imperative and to attain this linkage, songs like *Tupambane zaidi*, sought to spread the propaganda that NRA fighters were from far and wide, spread all over Uganda.

Songs also evoked grandeur as identity evolved and helped reaffirm attachment to an ideal. In Uganda, it was that promise to democracy, and an end to state violence. More salient was the fact that singing similar songs, ensured that combatants were one, notwithstanding their geographical location. To fully understand music, its performance more than its mere sounds must be examined. Analysis of the sound, behaviour and content as a cultural phenomena⁷¹ points to the presence of a hidden structure that united combatants and their supporters. Songs made sacrifices and suffering not only acceptable but easier to

⁷¹ See Mierian Alan P (1964), *The Anthropology of Music*, Evanston Northwestern University Press.

absorb. The rituals around it and vocabulary for describing certain events allowed for reconstruction of certain events by those who participated while providing interpreting behaviour of others in the process. A classic example of shaping behaviour of both initiates and veterans to conform to the interests of the struggle is given in the song, *We shall go on to fight*.

WE SHALL GO ON TO FIGHT

*We shall go on to fight
Fellow combatants and patriots in the struggle
We must not get tired of fighting for peace
We have lost our fair soldiers of all respects and
We shall fight until Uganda is free*

*Late Kazaula, Comrade Seguya⁷², late Magara⁷³ and late Bugereza.
They fought the bush war, heavy and encouraging,
until blood was shed for Uganda. Fellow combatants and patriots
in the struggle, our country Uganda must be free
we have lost our fair soldiers of all respects, and we shall go on
to fight until Uganda is free.*

*Comrade Shabani, Comrade Mutebi, Comrade Ime, and late Kataborwa⁷⁴.
They fought the bush war, heavy and encouraging, until blood
Was shed for Uganda. Late Mugisha Chese, Comrade Mugabe,
Joe Miiembe and Comrade Kato. They fought the bush war,
Heavy and encouraging, until the blood was shed for Uganda*

*Comrade Kato, Comrade Mondo, late Tumushabe, and late
Ndibalemwa, Comrade Musisi, Comrade Kakwesi, late Valige
And late Lwagaba, in Kitonga Nyancha*

In this song, the sacrifices of the fallen comrades are invoked. Their ultimate sacrifice is something to behold, and many more should emulate them and fight on in order that the price they paid is not in vain. It does not deny the deaths but points to the bodies lying in Katonga bridge. This should cause more motivation. Here, sacrifice is used to spawn more heroic deeds.

⁷² Ahmed Sseguya, first commander of NRA, died of natural causes.

⁷³ Second commander of NRA. Killed in Kampala while undergoing medical treatment following betrayal by intelligence.

⁷⁴ Sam Kataborwa, NRA external intelligence security officer based in Nairobi, killed by Obote agents in Kampala.

In the Kiswahili song *Moto uliwaka*, the image of fire and brimstone—as in the Bible—is evoked. The fire purifies in the sense that the guerrillas won the war.

MOTO ALIWAHA (Fire burnt)

Omoto wawaka mama moto wawaka

Omoto wawaka vijana eeh moto wawaka

Moto wawaka wazee

Moto uliwaka Luwero masulit

Moto uliwaka Entebbe, moto uliwaka Kabamba

Moto uliwaka Katera, moto uliwaka moto uliwaka Katonga

Oooh fire is burning mother, fire is burning

Fire is burning, fire is burning

Fire is burning old men

There was fire in Luwero, Mashita

There was fire in Entebbe, in Kabamba

There was fire in Katera, in Katonga

Omoto wawaka vijana eeh moto wawaka

Omoto wawaka, moto uliwaka Hoima, moto uliwaka Mpigi

Moto uliwaka Kiboga, moto utawaka Kampala na Jinja

Moto utawaka Arua na Soroti

Moto utawaka huko Lira

Moto utawaka kwa Tito Okello

Yee mwenyewe atataja

Moto utawaka kwa Basilio, sikumoya atataja

Fire is burning youth, fire is burning, mothers

There was fire in Hoima, even in Mpigi

There was fire in Kiboga, there will be fire in Kampala and Jinja

There will be fire in Arua and Soroti

There will be fire in there in Lira

The fire will reach Tito Okello

He himself will confess

Fire will reach Basilio, one day he will confess

The song has a double message; fire is feared, yet it is necessary. In this image of a tough struggle that has either taken place or is anticipated, a connection can be made in most African languages which refer to fire being lit when a situation is difficult. The second element is in terms of the actual setting off of fires. The message here is that guerrillas will set fire to areas they have not conquered; combat will be waged. They swear to do this to Okello, Obote and Basilio. As it is un-African to praise oneself, they seek to ensure that these leaders confess of their own accord.

Both NRA and RPA had similar songs that emphasised a connection between past struggles and also encouraged the combatants to fight on. The best examples are the songs *Tutasonga mbele* and *Vijana twendelee mbele*, commonly used as marching songs as the combatants traverse the country.

TUTASONGA MBELE (NRA version)

*NRA tutasonga, songa mbele, vita haijaisha
Kwenye nchi yetu, hatutatoka kwa mobilo
Hadi tutawaondoa wale wabaya wote
Mzee alianza mapambano huko Kabamba
Tarehe 6 mwezi wa pili, themaninin na moja
Na watu 27 Obote alifikiria ni mchezo sasa analia*

We NRA will advance, the war is not yet over
Over in our country, we shall not leave the mobile unit
Until we uproot all bad elements
The old man started the struggle in Kabamba
On the 6th of February 1981
With 27 people, Obote thought it was a joke and now he is crying

*Tulimchapa Masindi, tukamchapa Kabamba
Obote alijidai akawaleta wakorea na waingereza
Na silaha zao vile vile tuliwachapa
Waliobaki wa kakimbia, watarudi lini*

We beat him in Masindi, we again beat him in Kabamba
Obote boastfully brought in Koreans and the British
With their weapons and we beat them

*Hata Luwero Obote alijidai, akaleta wajeshi wake
Vile vile tuliwaondoa tukawakimbiza
Mpaka Kampala*

Even in Luwero, Obote boastfully brought in his army
Equally, we removed them and chased them away
all the way to Kampala

*Pongezi tunatoa kwa mzee Museveni na wengine
Kwa kupanga mipango ya kukomboa Uganda
Zawadi ni ushindi twende tukaufute
Kwa barabara zetu*

We give praise and thanks to Mzee Museveni and others
For planning programmes of liberating Uganda
Our reward for it is victory
Let us go and look for it by any means

*Tito alijaribu akakuja Masaka, Mbarara
Na wajeshi wa Amin, tuliwa chapa*

Waliobaki wakakimbia watarudi lini

Tito tried and even came to Masaka and Mbarara
With Amin's soldiers. We beat them, those
That remained fled, when will they come back

*Twatoa kwa mzee Museveni, Commander Tumuine
Afande Rwigyema, Saleh na wengine wote
wanaopanga mipango ya kupiga adui, zawadi
ushindi hebu tukautafute kwa njia zote*

We give praise and thanks to Mzee Musveveni, Commander Tumuine
Afande Rwigyema, Afande Saleh and all others
Who are strategising how to beat the enemy
Our reward is victory, let us go and look out for it by any means.

The principal theme in *Tutasonga mbele* is contempt of NRA combatants, for her enemies, hence the constant use of the words, 'tuliwachapa' (we beat them) and those who remained ran away. The defeat is portrayed as child's play. In common use, 'kuchapa' in Kiswahili refers to beating a child, while 'kukimbia' is also used to apply to children or cowards who run away. The movement sought to portray the image of their armies' invincibility *vis-à-vis* the bad cowards who must be chased out of Uganda.

In the song, 'Let us continue advancing', the same message is sent out. The youth are exhorted to continue advancing as their victory is assured. Obote is undermined and belittled, while indicating the strength of the NRA. An attempt is made to warn other pretenders, in this case, the interim regime of Tito Okello—he too will be beaten if he dares take on the guerrillas.

TWENDELEE MBELE (Let's move on)

*Wa vijana we, hamba
Twendelee mbele
Hamba
Ushindi ni wetu we
Hamba iyo iyo hamba*

*Obote wee
Hamba
Alijaribu
Hamba
Tukampiga*

Hamba iyo iyo hamba
Na Okello we
Hamba ukijaribu
Hamba tutakupiga
Hamba iyo iyo hamba

Music was used for education and to boost morale. It was constantly performed when marching to war, emerging from war, exercising or when relaxing. The emphasis was on songs with a chorus that could be easily adapted to different circumstances. Daily use of music for group and personal satisfaction evolved into a ritual. This in turn created a strong sense of unity. Graduates, officers and men became one moving mass towards a collective objective. It created a community, a structure that seemed to unite and was in harmony with its units. The structural “harmony” that it portrayed covered any contradiction of difficulties existing in the struggle, transmitting a sense of romanticism to those outside this structure. NRA combat women and *Kadogos* (young boys of ages 10–14) in full combat gear were always a sight to behold for many Ugandan peasants. As noted by Nyobi,

you know our society is very conservative, men had never seen women in combat, they had heard stories of women and children fighting. Many still did not believe. So during the siege of Masaka, they could see these well dressed women and boys singing. And it put them to shame, many believed if women could fight, there was no reason they should not. And that is how many more people and young people joined. We never used to see the veterans. I think NRA sent those women and boys specifically for propaganda purposes. You see, they were so smartly dressed, many peasants opted to join, thinking it was easy.⁷⁵

During the siege of Masaka and Mbarara, NRA experienced a huge influx of recruits willing to join and 9000 were recruited. As Monica Wilson notes, ritual reveals values at their deepest level. Men express in ritual what moves them most given the fact that this expression is conventional and obligatory. It is the values of the group that are revealed.⁷⁶ Music, sound and behaviour formed part of that ritual. As a symbolic vehicle, music contributed to the separation from daily realities and sustained community of resisters.

⁷⁵ Interview with William Nyobi, then a young boy growing up in Masaka.

⁷⁶ Monica Wilson, (1954: 241), in Turner Victor W. *The Ritual Process*, 1969: 6. Ithaca Cornell University Press.

However, song and dance served as not only a medium through which new forms of culture were transmitted to society, but also expressed. This was not the culture through which the elite sought to sustain class domination by orienting individuals towards the past rather than the future.⁷⁷ In Uganda, Obote constantly used the latent ideological constructions in an attempt to rationalise his control of power and to limit his subjects to a demeaning underdevelopment, under the guise of African culture⁷⁸ that needed to be conserved. In these latent ideological constructions, attempts were made to celebrate songs, poems and folklore and their nostalgia of past glory. NRM/A songs reflected the emerging new culture in Uganda. This was a manifestation of the daily struggles against repression, underdevelopment and sectarianism. It reflected the growth of social relations in which people sought to discover the social laws and structures responsible for their underdevelopment and what needed to be done to reform them. Songs transmitted the process, costs and benefits that would accrue from these struggles.

⁷⁷ Thompson, J.B, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, Polity Press, 1990: 41.

⁷⁸ *Uganda Resistance News*, Vol. 1, 1981, *op. cit.*

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Ethnic Identity and Stereotypes in Popular Music: *Mūgiithi*⁷⁹ Performance in Kenya

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<i>Mūgiithi ūyū, Mūgiithi ūyū, Mūgiithi ūyū x4</i>	This train, this train, this train, this train
<i>Mūgiithi ūyū wa Daytona</i> ⁸⁰	This train of Daytona
<i>Salim nīwe ndereba, Mūgiithi ūyū x4</i>	Salim is the driver of this train
<i>Ūthiaga ūkīgambaga chu chu chu chu</i>	The train makes the <i>chu chu chu</i> sound while moving
<i>Mündū ahutie kīrīa atarī, Mūgiithi ūyū, x4</i>	Touch what you don't have ⁸¹ , in this train

The given song is an example of the climax of a *Mūgiithi* night (mostly late in the night, when the greater part of the audience has had one too many drinks) where patrons in a bar or night club glide along in a train-like formation. The dancers are linked by holding on to the waist or shoulders of the one ahead. The climax marks the end of a night, where the one-man guitarist takes the audience through a whole range of lyrics, some original, but most of them renditions of popular songs. Themes in the lyrics range from religion, romance, and sex, and most

⁷⁹ The word 'Mūgiithi' is derived from 'mixsi' a term used in the 1950s to refer to a particular train that ferried both passengers and cargo in the same compartments. This is probably the earlier version of third class, and possibly the only train Africans were allowed to ride. The etymology of Mūgiithi is "mixed train" which Nairobi youth in the 1950s referred to as simply 'mixsi'. A Gikūyū rendition of mixsi would assume linguistic features common in other word borrowings. For instance, 's' is realised as th (e.g. thogithi, for socks, thothenji for sausage), mū- for noun class marker. I acknowledge my late father's oral explanation of the term Mūgiithi and my brother, Mūngai for the linguistic analysis.

⁸⁰ Daytona Nightclub on the fringes of Nairobi city is where artiste Salim Junior used to perform.

⁸¹ This line is subject to various interpretations. While people are holding each other's waist, there is the license in the performance for men and women to touch other in a sexually suggestive manner. It might also serve as a caution for people to mind their pockets or handbags in the event of pick-pocketing. I appreciate Sophie Macharia (a colleague) for the latter interpretation.

artistes use sexually explicit lyrics. The music is in all languages, Lingala, Dholuo, Gĩkũyũ, Kiswahili and English, and performances incorporate diverse people irrespective of gender, age or ethnicity. This phenomenon is mostly prevalent in major urban centres in Kenya. Note that the one-man guitar and *Mũgiithi* are not synonymous. Over years, the idea of a solo performer entertaining an audience has become an integral part in the bar/nightclub culture. The artistes discussed here all use *Mũgiithi* has to crown their performances. Ironically, *Mũgiithi* performance was adopted from the all-night religious *keshas* (charismatic prayer vigils) in Kenya, where the faithful come together “*join the train to heaven*” with Jesus as the driver of the train.

In a *Mũgiithi* night, we experience and encounter renditions of song done by established popular musicians, for instance, the guru of Gĩkũyũ music Joseph Kamarũ, Kakai Kilonzo, the renowned maestro of Eastern Kenya *benga*⁸², *Musaimo*, *Queen Jane*, amongst others. *This is brought about by the need to accommodate the disparate age groups, which patronize most of these restaurants and bars. Once in a while, the artist will introduce renditions of songs by musicians from all over the world, but subtly done in the local vernacular, but somehow retains the beat and the rhythm. This is a conscious effort, or financial strategy to give the performance a national and remotely global outlook.*⁸³

Introduction

At the popular political level, music and dance have become an inseparable part of political visibility and dignitarism. In the guise of entertainment, it often serves as a form of social and political discourse, a performed statement of popular acceptance, enhancement and

⁸² *Benga* was a result of Luo dance rhythms played on the acoustic guitar. *Benga* is actually a Dholuo word meaning ‘soft and beautiful’. However, other variations of *benga* emerged. According to Stapleton and May (1989: 231), “while the Luos followed root rhythms, Gĩkũyũ musicians like Joseph Kamarũ ... and Francis Rũgwĩti developed their own vernacular sound....while the Kamba band Kilimambogo Boys, created their own mesmerizing *benga* sound, keyed around instrumental patterns and frequent rhythm guitar breaks.” This is what I am referring to as Eastern Kenya *benga*.

⁸³ Until recently, none of the music has been properly recorded, thus cannot go beyond the walls of the restaurant. The recording, of live performances produces tapes of quite poor quality, but which sell widely due to the popularity of *Mũgiithi*.

legitimation of socially and politically coveted statuses and roles. In these senses, music and dance become signifiers of social and political hierarchizations.⁸⁴

In the run-up to the 2002 general elections in Kenya, popular music was an integral political campaign tool. The prevailing political atmosphere propelled pop-songs to national fame. The song *Unbwogable* by the Gidi Gidi Maji Maji duo is a telling testimony, as discussed by Hofmeyr, Nyairo and Ogude⁸⁵ in their paper on popular culture in Kenya. Mwai Kibaki, the presidential aspirant fronted by the coalition of opposition parties, upon his return to Kenya after weeks of hospitalization in London in December 2002, found a city abuzz with activity. As written in a newspaper article,⁸⁶

Hundreds of "Kibaki for President" posters, stickers, badges, handbills caps and T-shirts were distributed to the supporters, some of who wore outfits in Rainbow colours. As they awaited Mr Kibaki's arrival, the NARC supporters danced to the popular Gikūyū Mūgiithi and a corrupted version of Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's Unbwogable.

Mūgiithi is an urban phenomenon marked by cosmopolitanism, where age, race, tribe and gender identities are temporarily forgotten as participants dance around the club or the dance hall. The allegory of the opposition unity in 2002 is played out in the *Mūgiithi* performance as well as the above scenario, where people from all walks of life turned out to welcome their key presidential candidate. Prior to this though, *Mūgiithi* had continually played out diversity among patrons, especially in urban settings. However, given that the presidential aspirant was from the Gikūyū ethnic group, was this why the crowds invoked this particular music? The crowd had a national outlook, given that Kibaki was a candidate proposed by the various parties. What was the role of the song *Unbwogable*? This paper endeavours to understand the varying circumstances that may have precipitated the vast growth of *Mūgiithi* and answer questions concerning whose interests this music serves.

⁸⁴ D.A. Masolo. 'Presencing the Past and Remembering the Present: Social Features of Popular Music in Kenya', in *Music and Racial Imagination*. (2000: 368).

⁸⁵ Isabel Hofmeyr, Joyce Nyairo and James Ogude. '«Who Can Bwogo Me?»: Popular Culture in Kenya', in *Social Identities* 9 (3), 2003.

⁸⁶ Njeri Rugene and Mugo Njeru. 'A Hero's Homecoming', *Sunday Nation*, online Edition December 15th 2002.

Viewing music as a political-moral category⁸⁷ may help in understanding the issues. The last decade of Daniel arap Moi's regime (1990s) witnessed a major crackdown and suppression of art forms, which were deemed subversive. Editors were sent to jail, musicians were arrested and their music banned from the national broadcaster, and plays were banned as well. The musician as a political activist has borne the brunt of government censor.⁸⁸ *Mūgiithi* performance and the one-man guitar phenomenon proliferated against this uncertain background. Music with an obvious social message would not escape the axe of the government censor. Among some of the Gikūyū songs that were banned⁸⁹ are David Karanja's song, *Gītumia Gĩkĩ* (This Other Woman). This song was a clear cry from a son who had been mistreated by his stepmother. She had caused much anguish in the family:

Baba Ndūingate Gītumia Gĩkĩ
Nĩguo Mũcĩ ũyũ witũ ũgĩe na Thaayũ

Dad, please send this woman away
 So that we can have peace in our family

The authorities misinterpreted the song as a rebuke to the Moi government. They read it as a prayer to God to remove Moi from power, so that Kenya would be peaceful. The song was banned from the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC)—the national broadcaster—airwaves and records withdrawn from music shops. Peter Kigia's *Reke Tumanwo* was also subject to misinterpretation in the 1990s. The song is a lament of a marriage gone sour, and the protagonist is calling for an end to the affair. The song was given serious political connotations.⁹⁰ Despite this,

⁸⁷ Masolo (2000: 372) "[m]ost ... performers do not only entertain; they are also able, and frequently they aim, to raise the awareness level of their audience by arousing in them the imaginative and emotive experiences towards social re-engagement in the form of collective identity."

⁸⁸ Commenting on the music termed as 'seditious' and 'subversive' that circulated among a wide audience especially in the early 1990s, Angelique Haugerud (1995: 29) argues that "such forms became crucial weapons in active struggles for political transformation. The banning of the music in public places had little or no effect." Popular music, so argues Haugerud, was somewhere beyond the reach of the state, as the proliferation of 'informal' performances in bars and night clubs took toll. It is in this light I appreciate the *Mūgiithi* performance.

⁸⁹ Worth noting, various musicians from diverse ethnic groups, with music otherwise thought to be subversive suffered the same fate. This attack was not peculiarly directed to the Gikūyū, but I quote Gikūyū examples to suit the specifics of the paper.

⁹⁰ See Evan Mwangi's article 'Journal's Special Issue on Kenya Focuses on Culture' in the *Sunday Nation* online edition of October 19th, 2003 where he argues that the song was politicized, by the consumers though, as a statement against single-party politics. <http://>

Mūgiithi still thrived. Whereas most of this banned music was properly recorded and submitted for broadcasting, *Mūgiithi* has existed mainly in bars and restaurants and this provides what its audience “*perceive as a world stage upon which the feelings of powerlessness could be exiated*” (Stokes, 1994: 102). The informality of the performance helps it achieve the political goals.

As a response to the harsh political reality, the performance can be considered a form of passive resistance (Scott, 1985: 34), referred to as to ‘everyday resistance’ as opposed to ‘open defiance’, *Mūgiithi* comes out as the former, unlike the explicitly political lyrics in the run-up to the 1992 general elections in Kenya. *Mūgiithi* has been successful in subtly expressing the discontent of the public. Scott acknowledges that passive resistance is quite informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate *de facto* gains.

Open insubordination in almost any context will provoke a more rapid and ferocious response than an insubordination that may be as persuasive, but never ventures to contest the formal definitions of hierarchy and power.

The informality in the *Mūgiithi* performance⁹¹ explains how it gained prominence at the Coast after the infamous politically instigated tribal clashes between the indigenous coastal people and residents from upcountry in August 1997. The message in the lyrics, while cosmopolitan in nature was also a chance to hit back at the authorities for the political violence. This was very courageous considering the time, but the main *Mūgiithi* artistes in Mombasa at that time came from Nairobi where the Moi era was in clear decline.⁹² The boldness was crucial in changing the demeanor of the voters, making them more brazen.

www.nationaudio/News/DailyNation/supplements/lifestyle/current/story191013.htm.

⁹¹ As I have argued in a different paper on urban identities and *Mūgiithi*, the performance falls under what has been termed as ‘bar productions’ Ndirigiri (1999: 90), where artistes have redefined the bar in urban centres as a space for performance. Most of the music is not given airtime on most broadcasting stations. In this context, the informality of *Mūgiithi* refers to its performance within places of recreation, and hence its association with leisure, though at a deeper level, as this paper argues, the performance becomes a vital component in the service of identity.

⁹² Nairobi, in both the 1992 and 1997 elections remained an opposition orbit with KANU the then ruling party garnering a very low percentage as compared to Ford-Asili and DP. As Kimani Njogu argues, the politics of Central Province, (a traditionally opposition zone during Moi’s era) affect the politics of Nairobi mainly because of the proximity between the two geographical areas. See Kimani Njogu’s ‘The Culture of Politics and Ethnic Nationalism in Central Province and Nairobi’ (2001: 199)

The performance served as a rallying call for “*watu wa bara*”⁹³ at the Coast to come together in the face of adversity. It is in bringing the disparate people together that the performance has articulated the realization that in most circumstances, voicing discontent can succeed only to the extent that it hides behind the mask of public compliance, as Scott argues. The live performances in bars and restaurants may be a common occurrence, but behind it, the *Mūgiithi* performance serves a distinct political end especially for a group under threat.

Music and Identity

Ideas about the special link between music and identity are frequently offered to explain why a particular social group—community, population, nation—cultivates outmoded and seemingly irrelevant practices. In this case, ethnic identity is therefore invoked by individuals or social groups when it suits their purposes and helps them attain their goals. Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o in his novels has consistently used music as a means of both recognizing and rectifying identity in the Kenyan situation. In novels such as *The River Between*, music is used to indicate polarities between groups with traditional Gĩkũyũ values and the Christian converts. In *Petals of Blood*, contemporary popular culture is constructed partly through the discussion of musical and peri-musical phenomenon. *Devil on the Cross* discusses music as an agent for change within the post-colonial situation with Gatuĩria, the music researcher, developing a symphony drawing the various elements of Kenyan musical cultures together in an affirmation of an African national identity in the face of a rapacious colonial past.

In discussing, Barth (1969:14) argues that,

ethnic categories provide an organizational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural systems. They may be of great relevance to behavior but they need not be; they may pervade all social life, or they may be relevant only in limited sectors of activity.

This approach suggests that music may be used in a more active manner. As Baily argues,

⁹³ Kiswahili for ‘upcountry people’ but has derogatory meanings when used by the indigenous coastal communities.

music is itself a potent symbol of identity. Like language (and attributes of language such as accent and dialect), it is one of those aspects of culture, which can, when the need to assert 'ethnic identity' arises, most readily serve this purpose. Its effectiveness may be two-fold, as he continues; not only does it act as a ready means for the identification of different ethnic or social groups, but it has potent emotional connotations and can be used to negotiate identity in a particularly powerful manner.

The rise of *Mūgiithi* therefore in the late 1990s in Mombasa, and its use during the 2002 political campaigns in Kenya can be explained thus. The wide array of themes tackled in the music encompasses common problems afflicting the ordinary person due to poor leadership.

In a rendition of Tabu Ley's *Muzina*, Mike Murimi, a leading *Mūgiithi* artiste, makes fun of a government policy that affected Kenya in 2001, when the national grid system could not provide sufficient electricity to its citizens. A power-rationing strategy was introduced. Murimi sings about a man, whose wife gave birth at midnight, but they could not take her to hospital because the power had been rationed for that particular night. Through the renditions and corruption of a number of popular songs across Kenya, Africa and the West, the music in the *Mūgiithi* performance cuts across ethnic, racial and gender barriers, hence its wide appeal. The common denominator that one can identify here is a fraternity in suffering. This paper is an attempt to examine whether or not the popular appeal to a 'national audience' should be construed to mean that *Mūgiithi* performance is a national endeavour.

Various songs in the *Mūgiithi* performance are known to echo ethnic consciousness. On the ethno-poetic stratagems in the lyrics and narration of the songs is the over-emphasis of stereotypes of the numerous ethnic categories in Kenya.⁹⁴ Certain subtleties restrict the songs purely to a Gikūyū audience. This portrays the ambiguities and complexities of the *Mūgiithi* performance. Even when the performance is largely an urban phenomenon, certain ethnic proclivities are manifest.

⁹⁴ Mwangi (2003) cautions against the tendency among scholars to over-emphasize on the 'transformative' power of popular culture. We need to cast a suspicious gaze at popular culture because its products can be a conduit of stereotypes, especially against ethnic communities, women and other marginalized members of the society.

Stereotypes and Ethnic Identity

Kenya is currently more ethnically divided than ever before.⁹⁵ Ethnic chauvinism rose over the past 15 years mainly due to Moi's manner of handling political challenges. Politicians have worsened the situation by consciously mobilising ethnic symbols and support to further their competition with others in the era of political pluralism. This is most evident in daily stereotypes and popular comedies, songs and newspaper cartoons, among other popular art forms.

Stereotypes are often exaggerated, negative and inaccurate. When they are negative, they lead us to expect negative behaviour from out groups. One of the reasons that stereotypes are retained is that they serve several functions such as helping people to maintain a positive self-image, justifying their social status and worldview. In the Kenyan context, stereotypes have always existed and have been used to cause disunity among the citizens. The Gikūyū and the Luo communities in the 1990s had always been seen as opposed to Moi's rule.

*To Moi, the Kikuyu are powerful because they are populous, industrious wealthy and self-reliant. But they are individualistic, greedy and selfish, thus vulnerable to goodies dangled before them at the right time. The Luo are populous too, but are easier to contain – one offhand and ill-considered remark about 'only 5000' being required to buy a Luo betrayed this attitude. But they are also troublemakers who love nothing better than a good riot, and in any case have no interest in national stability because they have no stake in the economy. They were also poisoned a long time ago with dangerous Marxist ideas.*⁹⁶

It is intriguing that *Mūgiithi* musicians dwell heavily on the perceived differences and stereotypes among other communities. *Ukimwi Mbaya*

⁹⁵ Ethnicity in Kenya, just like most former colonies in Africa can be attributed to the colonial legacy where the colonial powers had the ability to leave colonies whose people were divided along ethnic lines for them to continue having strong holdings on their former colonies. "In the colonial state, they had struggled to have the colonial subjects united in the service of colonialism and yet remain divided when it came to promoting the political and economical interests of the colonized" argues Macharia Mūnene (2002). However the consequent governments of Kenyatta and Moi, and more recently Kibaki cannot be absolved of the same blame of perpetuating ethnicity for political survival in the postcolonial Kenya. See also Carol Sicherman in *Race and Class* 37.4 (1996: 63).

⁹⁶ Macharia Gaitho, 'Swelling phobia for big tribes: Love and hate have defined relationship with Kikuyu, Luo' in *Moi: End of an Era*, a special supplement of the *Daily Nation*, 24 December, 2002.

by Mike Murimi is a clear corruption of a popular AIDS awareness song by Princess Jully, which calls for people to engage in safe sex by using condoms. The ridicule comes in the recommendations of how many condoms one ought to use for different social or ethnic groups.

Ukimwi mbaya – AIDS is bad

Tumia condom – use a condom

Ukipata Gikūyū, tumia moja – if you get a Gikūyū, use one

Ukipata Mmeru, tumia mbili – if you get a Meru, use two

(Goes up to seven, for Borana)

Woi, lakini Jaluo, nyama kwa nyama – but for a Luo, skin to skin⁹⁷ (*don't use any*)

The song is in tandem with perceived sexual stereotypes amongst the different communities in Kenya, which form an interesting research topic.⁹⁸ However, the stereotypes are couched in such ridiculous comments, eg *Ukipata Kalenjin, tumia sita* (if you get a Kalenjin girl, use six condoms!)—a different number for each community. But for the Gikūyū, where most of *Mūgiithi* artistes hail from, the association of their ethnic roots with normalcy (using just one) is significant. Another *Mūgiithi* artiste, Mike Rua perpetuates the same sexual stereotypes for different communities in Kenya.

The Gikūyū women are liked because of their agility in lovemaking

The Luo women because of the large bosom

The Luyha women because of their strong leg calves

The Kamba women because of their sweetness.

This would be an example of stereotypes in the colonial discourse of Homi Bhabha, “... [T]he stereotype is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always in place, already known and something that must be anxiously repeated.” In line with this, it is crucial to note that most ethnic stereotypes in Kenya were propagated by the colonial authorities in their divide and rule policy. Macharia Munene (2000: 2) quotes colonial apologist Elspeth Huxley, “[S]he believed Gikūyū were secretly cheeky, while Luos were lazy, Kambas

⁹⁷ ‘Skin-to-skin’ makes a mockery of the Luo ethnic community’s avoidance of male circumcision, a derogatory indictment which has often been applied when the “reconvening of the old persisting struggles between the Luo and the Gikūyū in Kenyan national life” (Cohen and Odhiambo, 1992:15) surfaces.

⁹⁸ For a detailed analysis of different stereotypes among Kenyan communities, see Phyllis Nyambura’s article, ‘The Good, the Bad and the Ugly’ *Saturday Nation*, Online Edition, 27 December 2003.

sex maniacs and Somali and Maasai were trustworthy.” However in post-colonial Kenya, political discourse has always been couched in ethnic othering, with a view of “*animalising the Other ...[where] Kenyatta’s ethno-cultural conclusion of the the Luo fits Max Weber’s notion of social closure*” argues Atieno Odhiambo (2002: 242). Such nuances are clearly expressed in the songs during a *Mūgiithi* performance.

By parodying important songs by other communities through corrupting the lyrics, they make these songs sound quite meaningless and ridiculous. The following Luhya⁹⁹ song is an example.

<i>khulikherwa eying’ombe x3</i>	we’ve been brought a cow—for dowry
<i>mulayi wa mama</i>	a beautiful cow
<i>eying’ombe</i>	a cow
<i>konanga ni mbara eying’ombe x3</i>	I sleep while thinking about the cow
<i>mulayi wa mama</i>	a beautiful cow
<i>eying’ombe</i>	a cow

This is a wedding song, celebrating the value of dowry in the community, which is paid in cows. The *Mūgiithi* musician subverts the whole theme of the song, and uses it to rebuke his sister Wanjirũ.

<i>Ūrĩ mwega, no wĩ ng’ombe</i>	you are so nice, but you are a cow
<i>Wanjirũ wa maitũ</i>	Wanjirũ my sister
<i>Ūrĩ ngombe</i>	you are a cow
<i>Ūgũkamwo nũũ</i>	who do you think is going to milk you
<i>Mwanĩrie waku no ta wa ngombe</i>	you sound like a cow
<i>Mũkinyũkĩrie waku no ta wa ng’ombe</i>	you even walk like a cow
<i>Nginya mahũngũ maku no ta ma ng’ombe</i>	your legs are like a cow’s hooves

⁹⁹ The wording of the song may be different, since the Luhya community comprises of different dialects. I am indebted to my colleague Leontyne Wamukoya for this translation and interpretation of the song.

It is in such renditions that give key songs such crude connotations¹⁰⁰ to satisfy its audience that the music might be considered insensitive to other cultures. Nevertheless, the same musicians distort lyrics of fellow Gikūyū musicians giving them bawdy connotations, and they are not just limited to mimicking religious hymns and traditional songs of other communities.

This corruption of the following gospel song is almost similar to the above one but also ends up making fun of the Luo community and their main economic activity, fishing. The original version is as follows:

Njakīra nyūmba mwathani
Njakaga ikamomoka
Nī ngeretie maita maingī
Itarī nawe ndingihota

help me build my house lord¹⁰¹
 whenever I try, it keeps falling apart
 I have tried several times,
 but without you I cannot make it.

The corrupted version by Salim Junior,

Njakīra nyūmba mwathani
Njakaga ikamomoka
Jaluo irageria gwaka
Thamaki ikamomora
Thamaki ciageria gwaka
Jaluo ikamomora

help me build my house lord
 whenever I try, it keeps falling apart
 when the Luo try to build theirs
 the fish demolishes them
 when the fish try to build theirs
 the Luo demolish the houses

This song is filled with political overtones and symbolism. It signifies the political tensions that have always existed between the Luo and the Gikūyū communities in Kenya from the post-independence period of Kenyatta and Jaramogi Odinga's conflicts. Building a house here denotes ascendancy to the highest political office in the land, the presidency. Although clothed in humor, the well-peddled stereotypes amongst the different Kenyan communities are quite explicit in most *Mūgiithi* performances.

On the other hand, so-called stereotypes are also comments of day-to-day happenings among ordinary people. As Stokes (1994: 97) argues, "*performance doesn't simply convey cultural messages already*

¹⁰⁰ Despite the gender insensitive nature of such a song, the setting of the *Mūgiithi* performance obscures such gendered readings, and both men and women are so engrossed in the revelry, in a 'free-for-all' mode where all inhibitions are cast aside.

¹⁰¹ The implied meaning is 'help me be steadfast in my faith, Lord, I keep backsliding'.

known, it reorganizes and manipulates everyday experiences of social reality, blurs, elides, ionizes and sometimes subverts commonsense categories and markers". During the drought experienced in 1994, a small boy is said to have died of food poisoning in the Eastern province of Kenya, where in an effort to save himself from hunger, devoured the flesh of a dead dog. This incident, reported in the press, was ingrained in most Kenyans minds. A stereotype hitherto attributed to the Kamba people is that they eat dog meat. Thus, Mike Murimi's corruption of Kakai Kilonzo's song makes fun of this community and their tendency to consume dog meat.

This paper argues that ethnic feelings and biases as expressed in these songs are not just interesting relics of a past, but live on in the cultural repertoire of present-day Kenya and form part of the perspective through which Kenyans view contemporary events. Elements of the cultural legacy are often ethnocentric and come to influence reactions and interpretations of current events. The following example illustrates this. The song is a result of the unusual marriage between a 67 year old widow, Wambui Otieno¹⁰² and 27 year old Mbugua, in 2003. Wambui had been married to an eminent lawyer S.M. Otieno who died 18 years ago. Cultural differences between her and her husband's community caused tension and a protracted legal battle on where to bury him. She finally lost the case and detached herself from her late husband's community. The *Mūgiithi* artistes have dramatised this in a corruption of Suzzanne Owiyo's song *Kisumu 100*, released for the city's centennial celebrations:

Haiyayee tera athi anee Kisumu

Haiya yee take me to go and see Kisumu

Kisumu ber Kisumu tera adhi anee Kisumu

Kisumu is good Kisumu take me to go and see Kisumu

Ndege aidho tera winam

¹⁰² Wambui Otieno-Mbugua is a well known personality and occupies a significant place in the Kenyan social imaginary, partly because, "*of the prominent and outspoken roles she has played and adopted in Kenyan political life, and principally as a result of ordinary Kenyans' absorption in the saga surrounding the burial of her husband SM Otieno in the mid 1990s*" (Cloete, 2002: 12–13). Propelling her further into the national limelight was her wedding in 2003 to a 27-year-old man, Mbugua. Musicians, comedians, like Redykyulass comedy group have picked on Wambui as a theme in their art. Emily Nyagūthii's assistance in providing some of the recordings of Redykyulass shows on Wambui's wedding is appreciated.

I'm boarding a plane to take me to the lake

Aidho meli tera wi got

I'm boarding a ship to take me to the hills

Anadwaro kenda onge ng'ama tera

*I want to do this by myself, no one is taking me*¹⁰³

The 'other' version,

Haiyayee gütiri njamba Githumo

Gütiri njamba Githumo

Nĩthiite kinya Githumo

Kũrora kana kwĩ njamba

No gütiri njamba

haiya ii, there is no hero in Kisumu

there is no hero in Kisumu

I have gone up to Kisumu

to check whether there is a hero

but there is no hero

This relates to what Wambũi herself said after her second marriage, “*Tell Nyalgunga people that I have gone forever... I am now married to a Kikuyu from Gilgil. They should look for another Wambui!*”¹⁰⁴ The musician takes his cue from this in saying ‘there is no hero in Kisumu’, probably up to the task to handle Wambũi. Additionally, in relation to the protracted legal battle between Wambui and her husband’s Umira Kager clan in 1986, the song can be considered a ridicule of the clan, which despite emerging victors in both the High Court and the Court of Appeal, could not hold Wambũi as subject to Luo customary practice. Young Mbũgua signifies the archetypical Gĩkũyũ riding roughshod over their bitter political rivals, the Luo.¹⁰⁵

This returns to the issue of ‘Othering’ discussed earlier. The political differences between the Gĩkũyũ and the Luo in Kenya have shaped the politics in Kenya. KANU, the long-standing ruling party immediately after independence, and the coalition body NARC, the opposition party replaced KANU after more than four decades were both hinged on some form of unity between the two major ethnic communities in Kenya.

¹⁰³ Translation by Dina Adhiambo, a colleague.

¹⁰⁴ A Nyatiti player, Ogwang’ k’Okoth in 1987 (quoted in D.A. Masolo’s article, ‘Presencing the past and remembering the present: social features of popular music in Kenya.’ 2000: 386) composed a song highlighting the legal tussle between Wambui Otieno and the Umira Kager clan over where to inter the remains of S.M Otieno. The song quoted from the *Mũgiithi* artiste seems like a rejoinder to Ogwang’s song. It denotes how songs speak to each other over different historical moments.

¹⁰⁵ Credit to Joyce Nyairo for this insight.

Cultural Nights

In 1998, a new entertainment phenomenon referred to as ‘theme nights’ emerged. A more fitting term would be cultural nights. At these occasions, different Kenyan communities on different nights meet to engage themselves in cultural activities where music from the communities along with traditional food and drink are served. It is also a chance for the community to showcase its up-coming music talent to its members. They have existed in different names for diverse communities—*Malo Malo* night for the Luo, *Bango* night for the coastal people, *Mūgiithi* night for the Gikūyū among others. It has been described as ‘the meeting of the village and the city’. According to the originator of the idea,

*many executives are too busy to travel upcountry to enjoy traditional music and dishes as often as they would like to, the village comes to them, giving them a taste of the life they yearn for. Here there is no class, no etiquette. One can dance holding one’s stomach, bottoms, leg or knee with no eyebrows being raised. Above all, it creates a sense of belonging.*¹⁰⁶

For the Gikūyū night to be labeled as *Mūgiithi* night clearly indicates that despite the attendant cosmopolitanism, it is still an ethnic endeavor. The trend among all these theme nights is changing, as people show up at functions for other communities other than their own to get a taste of different cultures.

Mau Mau Lyrics

In discussing the impact of the song-narrative in creating bonds among a community, Ruth Finnegan (1970: 285) in her seminal study of oral literature in Africa argues that,

one of the best examples of the use of songs for secret propaganda is the hymns [that were] used by the Mau Mau in Kenya in the early 1950s. This movement, part political, part religious was banned by government, and yet largely by means of these songs, was able to carry out active and widespread propaganda among the masses in Kenya.

¹⁰⁶ Omwa Obara, ‘When the village comes to town’. *Saturday Nation*, Online Edition, 18 October 2003.

The Mūgiithi performance in invoking some of the Mau Mau lyrics in the late 1990s and early 2000 provided patrons a forum to protest against Moi's suppression and economic marginalisation especially of the Gikūyū community.¹⁰⁷ Political themes have dominated the entire performance with the artiste actively engaging the audience through call-response techniques. This underlines the collective spirit that most of these songs seek to invoke. The corruption of popular gospel songs has been evident, but the performer has also recreated Mau Mau songs making them more relevant to contemporary situations. Such Mūgiithi performances, heavily laden with political messages and strong appeal to Gikūyū nationalism was prevalent in Thika prior to the 2002 elections, and other towns with a predominantly Gikūyū setting.

The recourse to Mau Mau songs, like *Twathiaga Tūkenete* (we used to travel happily) might also link the performance to the proscribed Mungiki movement, a politico-religious group that is mostly seen as a neo-Mau Mau movement. However, it also asserts ethnic pride of the Gikūyū. In this particular song, the musician invokes the 'House of Mūmbi'.

*Ona wathii Nairobi, tūrī o kuo
Ūthiī Narok, Baringo, Kabartonjo Tūrī o kuo
Nyūmba ya Mūmbi twīyūmīrīrie
Gūtīrī handū tūtārī*

If you go to Nairobi, we are there
Even Narok, Baringo, Kabartonjo
House of Mumbi, let's talk courage
We are everywhere.

Mention of Baringo and Narok is crucial. The former president hailed from Baringo, and Narok was an ethnic-cleansing site, where a "*post-election attack on Kikuyus who voted against the government party (KANU), took place in October 1993. The orgy of violence left 30 people dead and over 30,000 others displaced.*" (Kagwanja, 2003). The musician here expresses hope and determination, and an 'optimistic belief in total emancipation'. The song thus becomes a form of 'hope therapy'.¹⁰⁸

The evocation of the Mau Mau struggle is a metaphor of the realities in present-day Kenya. The reference to freedom fighters goes beyond

¹⁰⁷ Kimani Njogu notes, "*Central Province [predominantly inhabited by the Gikūyū] had seen a systematic decline in the social and economic spheres since the 1980s. The Moi regime had systematically worked to dislocate and neutralize its hold in the national arena, inherited from the Kenyatta era*" (2001: 382) [Author's emphasis].

¹⁰⁸ Muhoro Mwangi, 'The Song-Narrative Construction of Oral History Through the Gikūyū Mūthirīgū and Mwomboko' in *Fabula: Journal of Folk-Tale Studies* 38 (3/4), 1997.

an interest in imparting historical information and reconstructs the struggle as a “*myth which ordinary people would wish to ‘impose’ on reality, and to have it become the ‘truth’ and ‘natural—different from its official version*” (Gecau, 1997: 156). However, linking Mūgiithi with Mūngĩkĩ might be problematic. Whereas Mūngĩkĩ may be seen as a ‘peasant uprising’ for the youth, Mūgiithi, through its classless nature, is firmly associated with an urban middle class.

Conclusion

This paper steers away from the depiction of the ethnic identity as a disruptive force. Theorists have argued that ethnic identity is “*an ordinary aspect of selfhood and a basic social relation which has in the past provided a sense of relative autonomy from the centralizing ambitions of the postcolonial African State, moral community for cultural citizenship and the focal point of resistance against tyranny*” (Kagwanja, 2003; Dickson Eyo, 1999). What is referred to as ‘moral ethnicity’ differs significantly with ‘political tribalism’, which Berman and Lonsdale (1992: 462) view as a result of the patron-client relationships in modern politics and has undesirable effects towards achieving unity in a nation.

This paper therefore has been an attempt in understanding the ideology of vernacular music, ethnicity, class and political tensions in Kenya. The analysis is crucial because it is the different cultural values from all Kenyan communities that constitute the Kenyan national culture. The challenge however for vernacular musicians is to integrate the specific cultures of the various communities into the national whole.

It is imperative to note that Mūgiithi performance is couched in ambiguity, and that any attempt to analyze it without recognizing the contributing factors that led to its rise would be insufficient. Whether the performance is just another show of ethnic chauvinism, cultural regeneration, or a political mobilization tool in this context depends on the particular moment of production. There are clear indications of political leanings. It remains to be seen what the relevance of Mūgiithi performance is in the post-Moi era.



The above editorial cartoon in a Kenyan newspaper attempts to answer the question. No longer a performance of the oppressed, *Mūgiithi* has come to be associated with the ruling powers. Will the discontent in the coalition government make or break the ‘cosmopolitan’ *Mūgiithi*? The cartoon is a clear depiction of politics after the 2002 elections. The house across the river symbolises the centre of power, State House, where according to the cartoonist, the occupants enjoy the benefits of power, dancing to the *Mūgiithi* songs. The gentlemen on the other side of the river are meant to be KANU politicians from Kiambu district (a Gikūyū zone) who feel locked out of the ethnic axis of power. The power base now lies with the Gikūyū of Nyeri, symbolised by the President himself.¹⁰⁹

The songs quoted here are from three leading *Mūgiithi* artistes in Kenya—Mike Rua, Mike Murimi and Salim Junior. Discographic details of their works are difficult to find as this music is hardly ever played on radio stations in Kenya, and they all perform live in various locations. Nevertheless, this music is now available in pirated copies that give no details of recording dates companies. However, the phenomenal success

¹⁰⁹ During Kenyatta's reign, his henchmen vowed that the power would never cross River Chania, a geographic feature that divides two distinct groups of the Gikūyū community; the Kiambu Gikūyū and the Nyeri Gikūyū. One might argue that these are the two different ridges Ngūgi wa Thiong'o talks about in his book, *The River Between*. This editorial cartoon came after Kibaki visited the Kiambu district in a view of extending an olive branch to a people who overwhelmingly voted against him in the 2002 elections.

of the performance and the growing popularity has led to several other artistes, not necessarily from the Gĩkũyũ community, recording their own versions of *Mũgiithi*. These include Man Wanjohi and Wyre, appearing for Tedd Josiah, a 2002 production and Kayamba Afrika (2004). Salim Junior's renditions of other popular musicians' lyrics is regularly played on Gĩkũyũ FM stations, namely Kameme FM, Coro FM and Inooro FM. These latter versions omit the bawdy and sexually graphic lyrics that epitomize the repertoire of *Mũgiithi* performance.

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Song and Politics : the case of D. Owino Misiani

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Introduction

Over the years, songs have been used as a means to communicate political messages that may not be palatable across the political divide in Kenya. Such songs have provided the means to transmit political messages that would otherwise not have been expressed in common political language or speech. Lyrics are phrased such that the intended message escapes the literal understanding of the recipient. Therefore, to decipher the actual meaning requires an accurate and intelligent interpretation of both the language and the context. Likewise, the aesthetic form of song gives room for the performers' personal creativity of even if the dance expression is pre-determined by specifics of the language used. Every speech community has particular indices that signify and transmit specific meaning as well as evoke specific reactions and responses in their listeners. The "goodness" of a performance may be judged in relation to one or more of these expectations in the use and manipulation of speech forms as they are re-organised into song. These practical features and expectations of musical performance suggest that redundancy does not necessarily follow from a dominant use of orality.¹¹⁰

Music is also a potent symbol of identity. Like language, it is one

¹¹⁰ Masolo, D.A., 2000, "Presencing the Past and Remembering the Present: Social Features of Popular Music in Kenya," in R. Rodano and P. Bohlman, *Music and Racial Imagination*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 366.

of those aspects of culture, which can readily serve the purpose of asserting “ethnic identity”. Its effectiveness may be two-fold; it is used to identify different ethnic or social groups, and secondly, it has potential emotional connotations and can be used powerfully to negotiate identity.¹¹¹ To this end, African musicians remain both entertainers and the “eyes” or popular conscience in the articulation and interrogation of changes occurring at the various levels of public life and the problems they pose to society.

Performers do not only entertain—they are also able, and frequently aim, to raise social awareness in their audience by arousing in them the imaginative and emotional experiences toward social re-engagement through collective identity. Performers thus provide the indices by which audiences generate their sense of group membership by participating in deciphering and internalizing the meanings generated by the performance.

Music, both as a social performance and as a medium of communication, is more than a means for the reproduction of structural patterns of sound. According to Stokes,¹¹² it is also “*a practice in which meanings are generated, manipulated, even ironized, within certain limitations.*” Therefore, the narrative of music is understood only through interpretation, by paying careful attention to the context that shapes its creation and to the worldview that informs it. Sometimes the truth in song pulls one away from complacent security as an interpreter outside the story and creates awareness that one’s interpretation of music defies his place in the world.

Music enjoys high-profile political visibility in the modern state system. At the traditional level, music and dance took a central role in both social sacred and secular events. Dancing, accompanied by either drumming or some other kind of instrumental performance, was frequently part of important ceremonies ranging from marriage celebrations to rituals to cure spirit possession. These traditional roles of African music continue today, where it has been not only incorporated into regular school curricula in some countries, but also into the retinue

¹¹¹ Barth Fredrick (ed) 1969, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, 14. Bergen-Oslo: Universitets Forlaget.

¹¹² Stokes, M., 1994, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, Oxford: Berg, p. 4.

of official performance at high-level political gatherings.¹¹³

In this sense, African music enjoys a quasi-formal political recognition and occupies a central position in several national cultural policies. In some countries it enjoys state sponsorship as an important medium of its popular expression, representation, and legitimisation. At popular political level, music and dance have become an inseparable part of political visibility and dignity. Under guise of entertainment, it often serves as a form of social and political discourse, a statement of popular acceptance, enhancement, and legitimating of socially and politically coveted roles. Music and dance thus become signifiers of social and political hierarchisations. However, even within this modern state arena, there is an almost perfect continuity with the traditional multifunctional importance of music. As biographers, musicians in traditional settings were the indispensable source of social knowledge. Through their biographical songs and lore, they became popular educators of the practical possibility of idealised social and moral virtues. Through their own autobiographies and the biographies of others, they sang to demonstrate the common embodiment of desirable qualities of social and moral integrity, and leadership qualities.¹¹⁴

Musical language, like most forms of narrative language, is not merely descriptive. It also informs and influences. There are three analytically distinct and independent functions essential for the interpretation of meaning, even in musical language. First, the ideation function expresses the referential meaning of what is said—content in terms of the speaker's experience and that of the speech community.¹¹⁵ Second, there is the interpersonal function, which concerns the role relationships between speakers, thus allowing for the expression of social and personal relations through talk. Third, the textual function refers to structure, how parts of a text are connected syntactically and semantically. Meaning is conveyed at all three levels, although the ideational functional—that is, informational content about people, situations, and ideas that singers, as speakers and public intellectuals, intend to convey—tends to dominate communication. Thus the meaning of what someone says is not simply its ideation content; how something

¹¹³ Masolo, *op. cit.*, 367–8.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

¹¹⁵ Burke, K., 1950, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Berkeley: University of California, p. 37.

is said (textual function) in the context of the shifting roles of singer/speaker and listener (interpersonal function) is also critical.¹¹⁶

Africa, in general, is characterised by various musical styles and rhythms with roots from within and outside Africa. However, it is Congolese music that has had the widest impact in Africa and Kenya in particular. The founding father of guitar-based rumba music in Kenya was Jean Bosco Mwendar, a Sanga from Katanga (now Shaba) province in the Belgian Congo. Bosco was an urban musician who revelled in a multiple ethnic identity, singing of himself as Bosco wa Bayeke (Bosco, son of the Bayeke) and Bosco wa Basanga (Bosco, son of the Sanga), in Kiswahili, Lingala, KiLuba, and various other Congolese languages. Although Bosco remained resident in the Congo, he became highly popular in post-war Nairobi together with other Congolese musicians who later exerted tremendous influence on the Kenyan music scene.¹¹⁷

The Congolese influence on the Kenyan scene remained largely non-political in the pre-independence period. This was African political activity in Nairobi was banned until 1957, and it was therefore dangerous to sing overtly political songs in public. In addition, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (Voice of Kenya, at the time) was controlled by the colonial state, thus ruling out the possibility of political sentiments being aired over the radio. After 1960, the censorship of politicised material appears to have been partly relaxed. With prospects of independence on the horizon, urban Nairobi took to political songs with alacrity.¹¹⁸

After the ban was lifted, Kenyan artists began to cross ethnic boundaries established along linguistic and musical traditions by adopting the fashionable styles from Congo. It was on this basis that Luo musicians such as the late Ochieng' Kabaselleh adapted Congolese style successfully enough to garner considerable acceptance and following. On the other hand, musicians such as the late George Ramogi also continued to draw a large following in performances in the Luo vernacular, displaying the well-known *benga* style.

¹¹⁶ Masolo, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

¹¹⁷ Atieno Odhiambo, 'Kula Raha: Genedered discourses and the contours of leisure in Nairobi, 1946-63,' 257-258, in *Azania xxxvi-xxxvii 2001-2002*.

¹¹⁸ Atieno Odhiambo, *ibid*, p. 263.

Luo music and the Kenyan political scene

Songs and music play a central role in the cultural and ritual practices of the Luo of Kenya. They signify a process by which the Luo constantly re-invent themselves and their world, just as other communities do with their own music. One of the giants of the community in this area has been Owino Misiani, who has consistently managed to retain his huge following among his Luo people by being faithful to both the local *benga* style and to the socio-political themes his audiences crave. However, one of the most talented Luo musicians, Gabriel Omollo, has declined in recent years due to a lack of philanthropic gifts. He is popular for his award-winning hit songs with humorous and social messages for example ‘Lunch Time’, ‘Maro Oketho Ugunja’ (mother-in-law’s tragedy at Ugunja), ‘Mr. Agoya’ (wife beater), ‘Jopango’ (townsmen), and ‘Jaluo asili’ (authentic Luo).

Although most Luo musicians play the *benga* beat, there are different varieties. Owino Misiani, for example, has explained his own experience that evolved with time as he adapted to a faster variety of *benga* in the mid-1970s.¹¹⁹ This latter variety clearly differs from the *rumba* style and beat he played in the 1960s and which, curiously, he identifies as ‘Swahili’ (probably due to its urban origin and partner-holding dance style). His single ‘Akeyo nyar Kadem’ (Pretty Akeyo, daughter of the Kadem clan) epitomises his brief experience with *rumba*. His style of *benga* also differs from the earlier and slower *benga* of the 1960s, which was identified mostly with Gabriel Omollo, Ochieng Nelly and Ajwang’ Ogara before it too was overlapped and briefly overshadowed by the *Sweko* style of Owiti Origo and the Kajulu Boys Band in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹²⁰

On the political scene, Luo songs have been used to articulate political beliefs. Although songs are mainly composed for entertainment, they also serve the role of social mobilisation. Songs and music are to this end a powerful political mobilisation tool in all Kenyan communities. The influential role of music among the Luo has always put the community’s leading musicians at crossroads with the government of the day. In the late 1980s and 90s, the Moi regime clamped down on musicians and

¹¹⁹ Patterson 1994.

¹²⁰ Masolo, *op.cit.*, p. 365.

banned certain music or songs. In some cases, state machinery was used to confiscate music cassettes which they felt were being used to undermine the government of the day.

In 1983, President Moi ordered the arrest and subsequent incarceration of the musician Ochieng' Kabaselleh after accusing him of giving public performances in rural centres with guns hidden in acoustic drums "*meant for use to topple the government*," alleging that music was used as a cover-up for political subversion. The same fate has befallen Owino Misiani in all the successive regimes on the basis that he sings songs that not only undermine but also ridicule the government of the day.

Luo musicians have generally used music as a way to transcend the oppositions of time and social order. To this end, musicians such as Owino Misiani and Ochieng' Kabaselleh have played a central role as the conscience and mouth piece of the Luo community through music. They have used past occurrences to explain the present and give a portent of the future. This has been done through rhetorical inventions and definitions of the Luo as a separate but cohesive moral and political community, standing in contrast to the national political reality.

Owino Misiani

Musicians vary in their capacity to communicate to their target audience. Some coat their political messages in idiomatic and proverbial compositions intended to elude the comprehension of a superficial listener. Some are so simply put that only translation of the language is required to understand the message. However, others are so well hidden in the oratory that the controversy that comes with it takes keen listening and interpretation for the message to be understood. The latter form is what Owino Misiani and his Shirati Jazz Band have accomplished over the years.

Born in Shirati village of Tanzania's North Mara Province, Tarime District in 1940, Misiani first formed the Shirati Nectar Jazz in 1966 but later changed the name to Shirati Luo Voice Band. He however had to quickly drop the name as his fans in Tanzania challenged the Luo tag

in the band name, saying it smacked of tribalism. He then christened it **D O 7 Shirati Jazz**.¹²¹ His songs are characteristically full of imagery, making it difficult to interpret the message firsthand. Some of his songs revolve around slain political heroes like Argwings Kodhek, Tom Mboya, Oruko Makasembo and J.M. Kariuki.¹²²

The political overtones that characterise his music have earned him and the Luo community condemnation and reprisal including arrests, confiscation of his identification documents and on various occasions, expulsion from the country under the guise that he is not a Kenyan. Asked whether it was his nature to wax political lyrics Misiani opined that when he sings he does not realise that the songs are political. He was quoted as saying, “*sometimes I sing about lakes, fish and other things but when in two to three years, things happen, people say that I am a prophet*”. Misiani however acknowledges that his songs are about politics, love, death and life in general, all done with a critical mind.¹²³

Beyond Kenya: Misiani on governance in Africa

Misiani sings not only on the Kenyan political experience but has also sung about the African continent as well as on regional political events, giving ‘prophetic’ warnings about the future. Whereas Misiani is also known for love songs, political songs have been his mainstay and have earned him celebrity status as King of Benga music in the region. In his song ‘*President Amin*’ released in 1975 he lavishes Amin with praise especially on the use of “his strength” to prosper and rise to power. He praises Amin for acquiring and maintaining power despite condemnation from other leaders who were later left with no option but to recognise him as the president of Uganda. To this end, he negatively portrays and despises some African leaders whom he accuses of being full of talk, but easily influenced by foreigners at the sight of money. He argues that Amin keeps his word and is never influenced by money. In

¹²¹ In spite of the change, it has over the years been synonymous with Luo political overtures that qualifies it as true Luo voice band. Songs released as recent as 2003 e.g. *Bim en Bim* have expressed Luo political interests and complaints in the current government.

¹²² *East African Standard*, Friday April Leisure and Pleasure, 1995: 8.

¹²³ *Daily Nation*, 24 July 1992: VI.

this song Misiani tries to capture the East–West rivalry prevalent at the time and that saw African leaders ideologically falling prey to one of the power blocs. He argues to Amin's credit that he did not maintain any permanent international friends or foes and thus stood as one of the independent-minded African leaders at the time.

Misiani also praises Amin in the same song for expelling Indians from Uganda. In an apparent reference to the Entebbe hostage crisis, he marvels at Amin and portrays him as feared even by the Israelis. The contradiction that arises from these two songs portrays Misiani as a musician who does not have a biased position on issues but rather as one who articulates his thoughts on particular events independently.

However, Misiani's love for Amin did not last as the despot's governance in Uganda soon turned into a nightmare for Ugandan citizens. In another song, '*Amin Jamadari*' released in 1976, Misiani lamented the threat that cripples and other disabled persons in Uganda faced from General Idi Amin's regime. The brutal despot had embarked on a macabre mission of eliminating all disabled persons by allegedly dumping them in the swirling waters of the Owen Falls dam in Jinja, Uganda. In this song Misiani proverbially combines political criticism and condemnation with humanitarian appeal against the evils of the Amin regime that perpetrated the massacres.

Misiani's penchant for political events took his music to the unfolding political scenario in the southern Africa region. In the song, '*Africa*' released in 1985 he equates Africa to a beast of burden, the donkey. He laments that Africa has suffered under the colonial yoke, in particular under apartheid and colonialism. Among the issues that drove him to compose the song were the tribulations of the peoples of South Africa, Namibia as well as the untimely and suspicious death of Samora Machel of Mozambique. In the song he also states that the continued imprisonment of Nelson Mandela justified Africa's cry and struggle for freedom. He finally uses the song to pray for peace throughout Africa even as he blames colonialism for Africa's problems.

Nevertheless, Misiani does not consider all of Africa's problems as emanating from foreigners but also from indigenous leaders. In his 1996 release '*General Farah Aidede*' he explores the moral fibre of African political leadership that he claims is replete with intrigue, executions,

dictatorships and manipulation of the masses.¹²⁴ In this song Misiani again exemplifies that he is a forthright singer and will not shy away from laying blame where it belongs.

Analysing the Kenyan political scene through music

It is in the Kenyan political arena that Misiani's songs have had an impact specifically in the Luo community. He has also cut himself a unique style in the presentation of his music. This manifests itself in his imagery where he uses a variety of animals to depict and conceal the unfolding events in Kenya's political arena. He uses animals as symbols to depict different political actors. These range from individuals to ethnic groups, fighters and opportunists, beneficiaries as well as losers. The animals that he commonly uses in his songs are leopards, snakes, buffalos, lions, hyenas and baboons. Misiani's political songs can be traced to the immediate post-independence period to date. His political songs thus capture the socio-economic and political events that unfolded during the reign of all three presidents that have served Kenya—Kenyatta, Moi and Kibaki.

His song '*Jane Macline*' released in 1968 provides a background to the political events of the 1960s and the prominent personalities that dominated the political scene. These were men such as Oginga Odinga, Tom Mboya, Argwings Kodhek, Ronald Ngala and Oruka among others. The political disagreements that ensued between Kenyatta and Odinga in the mid-sixties is symbolically put in context but concealed in the personification of animals. "*Simba ruto to Kwach chur achura gi chunye to thuol wacho ni ter mos waloso*" (The lion is growling as the leopard rumbles in his thoughts in silence while the snake insists on taking things slowly as they were still discussing matters). The lion represents Oginga Odinga, the leopard represents Kenyatta, and the snake represents Mboya.

Apart from seeking to capture the thawed relations between Kenyatta and Odinga, the song seeks to depict Mboya as an individual who had betrayed the Luo by aligning himself with Kenyatta and by extension

¹²⁴ *East African Standard*, 16 February 1996: 30.

the Kikuyu community. In a community where age is a factor and the young are expected to respect elders, most opinion shapers especially in Central Nyanza felt that Mboya was undermining Odinga. This was considered not only as disrespectful but also as playing into the hands of Kenyatta and the Kikuyu community. In the same song Misiani marvels at the eloquence and magnanimity of Kodhek who was among the first African lawyers in Kenya. “*Piny dhi ariwa. Udhwe ka loso to tek winjo, joma winje to um a uma gi chunyi.*” He observes in his song that because of Kodhek’s intellect and wit, few people could understand him and even those who understood him kept the wisdom and knowledge in his words to themselves. Likewise he makes reference to the death of Ngala and Oruka in glowing tribute “*Jowi mager ema ichuogo piene kuot*”. (The fierce buffalo is the one whose hide is used to make a shield). Here Misiani realistically laments that it is the people who take the bull by the horn—liberators—that die in mysterious circumstances. Misiani acknowledged the role played by Ngala and Oruka, wondering why heroes who had fought for the independence of the country were being sacrificed.

Misiani practically recreates an old and famous text on Luo legends, *Thuond Luo* (Luo heroes) released in 1979. But he does so with significant and marked difference. He re-formulates an originally oral text that was recorded in writing in the 1950s. Scripted for use in primary schools during colonial times, the legendary narratives were among the vernacular texts adopted for teaching reading to children who attended school in their own speech community areas. Kiswahili texts were used in multi-ethnic urban areas. Misiani’s re-working of this text reverses its use from colonial to post-colonial. Not only does he retell his tale as a history and geography of the Luo people; he chooses to do so in music to teach the current school-going generation of Luo youth that is no longer taught nor cares to learn the vernacular, but who listen to his popular and influential music. He gives it a special idiom to signify its importance in the context of Kenyan national politics. By listing heroes from all the major Luo clans, Misiani underlines the political invention of the Luo as a unified and historically homogeneous community whose social and geographical territory is due to the militant heroes of the past.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Masolo *op. cit.*, p. 385.

In the second part of the song, Misiani adds to that list the more recent and current communal heroes. The latter, mainly the politicians who struggled for Kenya's independence from the British are praised for their central roles in the creation of post-colonial Kenya. In light of the underlying national politics, Misiani cleverly intends to draw the attention of his audience to the ironic contrast between the community's pivotal roles—through its leading representatives—in the struggle for independence on one hand, and its marginalization from the benefits of post-colonial development on the other. As Masolo (2000) has noted, to appreciate this powerful political statement, a listener must master Misiani's elegant and proverbial use of the Luo language as well as be familiar with his unique and easily recognized textual tradition.

This is indicated in a variety of ways in the first verse. By referring to himself as 'the notorious one' (*Magunga*), and by indicating that he is about to start on his usual themes (*ochako weche mage*), he underlines a personal and established style. The proverbial phrase *Jowi oluwo aora* (There is a buffalo upstream) warns of the hidden social text and demands keen listening to the oral text, thus emphasising the informational function of the music. However, the phrase is also a war cry; in the traditional rendering, it would be both an announcement that the community had been exposed to the threat of an invasion, and a rallying call to the warriors of the community to take up arms in defence of the community. It exhorts a communal conscience and self-awareness which, in a curiously Hegelian sense, is elicited by identifying the opposition between self as a collective, and Other. The song, then, might also be seen as a criticism of the current communal leadership for not doing enough. It is therefore a call to the leaders to be courageous and take action as they remember the achievements of the departed heroes—"Oh it is virtuous to be a hero." The song is an evocation and provocation to political action.¹²⁶

In *Upime Nade*, released in 1982, he predicts chaos and suffering in Africa due to bad leadership. According to the song, leaders in Africa have lost direction and there is nobody to rescue the populace whom they reign over. He goes on to lament that people fought for independence and won it, in the hope that peace would prevail and that poverty would be eradicated. On the contrary, within a short time

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

signs of chaos became evident. He uses Kenya as a case in point of how leadership in Africa is failing. This he does through the symbolic animals. He articulates his message in this song by observing that the leopard is on the loose. This song articulates a further admonition of the Kenyatta regime which he blames for the entrenchment of personal rule emanating from several amendments to the constitution that created a powerful presidency without checks and balances. Likewise he blames the *de facto* one party rule that Kenya had been placed under after the ban on KPU in 1969, which facilitated Kenyatta's imperial presidency thus enabling him to govern according to his own whims. He points out that the struggle for the second liberation that lies ahead would not be easy and blames the Kenyatta regime for the suffering of the masses. In the final analysis, he views Odinga as the sacrificial lamb of the Kenyatta regime. Despite his immense contribution to the attainment of independence and Kenyatta's release and attendant ascent to power, Odingo was cast by the wayside. Misiani reminds Kenyans that we are all equal as citizens and therefore should be aware of imminent chaos if misrule continues.

Another song *Gor Mahia PT 2* released in 1983 makes reference to the events of the failed 1982 coup attempt. The leopard is used in this song to symbolise the Kikuyu community struggling to wrest power from Moi. The tribal overtones that arise are depicted in the struggle for power between the Luo and Kikuyu community as manifested in the Njonjo planned coup *vis-à-vis* Ochuka's counter coup that failed. He infers that the pro-Kikuyu coup plan was slated for 5 August, countered by the Luo with theirs on 1 August 1982: "*Kwach wacho ni dhawo to pod podi tarehe tano watimo kamano. Kwach wacho ni telo to pod margi makata nade to gi telo diriyo*". This translates as the Kikuyu claiming that they will reclaim power and that a Kikuyu will and must lead Kenya for a second time. Misiani also introduces a third party into the picture. This is the hyena, symbolising Moi and the Kalenjin community whom he portrays as the beneficiaries of the spoils of war between the Kikuyu and Luo communities. He depicts both the Kikuyu and Luo as too engrossed in their own battles while power remained in the hands of Moi and his Kalenjin community, "*Otoyo to nyiero ni ring'o mangenygi, dhaw to en maru, kuon gi choke to odong emesa makata uringo to wadong' ka wachamo*." The struggle against the Moi

regime that preceded the 1982 coup forms the basis of the song. The words “*Mach odhuro kuome dipo ka owang’o thurwa ka en gi chung’, chako chon ber yie ulur alura ka onindo*,” infer that there were numerous Kikuyu (at the time) in the military, who were also wealthy hence the need for the Luo to undercut them while they were not on their guard. It is in this vein that he fully supports the failed coup attempt by the mostly Luo group led by Ochuka. In Misiani’s words, the best way to deal with a ‘leopard’ was while it was still asleep.

Whereas he seems to warn Moi of the danger of the Kikuyu who are in pursuit of power and have the intention of dislodging him, he supports the attempt by the Luo community to ‘grab’ power. In his analogy, the common enemy is the ‘leopard’ who must be dealt with immediately. Post-1982 coup events that culminated in the Njonjo Commission of Inquiry also elicit Misiani’s attention in the song. While referring to Njonjo’s pardon after he was found guilty on several counts by the commission of inquiry, Misiani cautions Moi, questioning his leniency to Njonjo “*Bwana wuon diek wek timo ng’wono kamano. Kodhi no to rach en ng’ama oyiki emwa puoyo. Tang’ chon ber... aora oba wang’e oula mang’ongo, en kama udino no emaomwomo*.” He goes on to say that a good Kikuyu is only one who is dead and warns Moi to be wary of the Kikuyu community’s resilience, as they would one day hit back.

In the song “*Kwach Rakido*”, released in 1984 he equates Kwach, the Luo word for Leopard to the Kikuyu community just as in the previous song and in particular Njonjo, to whom the term *Rakido*, the spotted leopard, is specifically assigned. In this song Misiani exemplifies a sense of courage saying things that many Kenyans would never dare say in public. He warns of and also predicts Njonjo’s cunning and deadly ambitions. Reference to Njonjo as ‘a spotted leopard’ had a double meaning. Not only is Njonjo known to the public for and by his habitual pinstriped suits, he was, in his political heyday, also known for his political habit of punishing anyone who tried to come between him and his insatiable ambitions. During the proceedings of the judicial commission of inquiry into allegations of his sabotage of Moi’s presidency in 1983, several people, including prominent politicians gave evidence about Njonjo’s politically vengeful and destabilising acts. Using the metaphor of the calculating and unrelenting habits of a leopard preying on expectant herds, Misiani’s representation of Njonjo

as a political leopard warned of his ability to sabotage the expectant future of the state unless he was immediately stopped.¹²⁷

Piny Owacho released in 1984 examines Moi's leadership in the post-coup period and provides a recap of the coup events making specific reference to the Nyakach clan of the Luo community from which Ochuka, the coup leader hailed. In this case, his discourse on the Luo community is interspersed with those of a particular clan. He praises the Nyakach for saving the Luo community from the ills that the Kikuyu coup would have imposed on the community. In the song he also laments the deaths of Luo leading lights which he blames on the Kikuyu. These include Ochuka, Oteyo Okumu and others who had earlier passed on like Mboya and Makasembo. Misiani is more forthright in his lamentations in this song ostensibly because the emotion that characterised the coup had died out by the time he sang the song. Besides this was way after the coup plotters had already been tried, convicted and were only awaiting execution. Misiani ends the song with an implicit appeal to the president to use his mercy prerogative to pardon the coup plotters in a reconciliatory tone that is devoid of bitterness. This brings out Misiani's art as not only meant for entertainment but also geared towards publicising the communities' tribulations as well as the ability to empathise in times of crisis.

Misiani's music has also dwelled on ethno-cultural issues and politics. For example in *S.M. Otieno* released in 1987, Misiani's penchant for controversy was once again evident. The song is about S.M. Otieno's (a prominent Luo lawyer) burial controversy, which pitted the Umira Kager clan of Siaya against Otieno's widow, Wambui over his final burial place. It initially seemed to be a family affair but rapidly was transformed into a cultural struggle pitting the Luo and the Kikuyu communities. Misiani joined his Luo brethren in campaigning for the burial of Otieno in his ancestral homeland. In the song he cites examples of prominent Luo personalities who had died and all of whom were buried in their rural homesteads. Included in his citations were Tom Jachula, Agwingi Rateng', Ongili Owiti, Robert Angawa, Oruka Makasembo, Tom J. Mboya, Owigo Magenge, Otieno Ambala, Joshua Abuya, Otieno Oyoo and Paul Mboya. The final court verdict in favour of the Umira Kager clan, it was considered as a symbolic triumph of the

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 386.

Luo over the Kikuyu.

Misiani's lamentations in that year did not end with the S.M. Otieno saga. In the same period came the *Omieri* saga that pitted the Nyakach clan against the Government (Kenya Wildlife Services). The clan resisted the relocation of *Omieri*, a huge snake that had been partially burnt by bushfire and was considered a good omen by the people of the area, according to their culture and traditions. However, *Omieri* was finally relocated. The song *I am Tired* is an appeal for the return of *Omieri* to Nyakach. Misiani warns Kenyans and the Luo in particular against being swayed by western culture at the expense of their own traditions. He relates the relocation of *Omieri* with the tribulations of the Luo community and questions what 'Jonyakach' (the people from the clan) are doing this time around to save the community given their past record of bravery as coup plotters. He thus advocates for the return of *Omieri*. The parallel in these two songs is that even though both incidences were cultural they were quickly ethnicised and politicised and although they both involved particular clans within the Luo, Misiani makes them issues for the entire Luo community.

Misiani has also largely been associated with personality politics through political songs that praise individuals who have contributed to development in their localities. This indulgence is to be found in a retinue of songs that he released in 1989. They include *Hon Osogo* of Port Victoria, *Owigo Gogni* of Ndhiwa, *Charles Owino* of Migori, and *Hezekiah Oyugi*, a former powerful Permanent Secretary in the office of the president in charge of internal security. He praises the latter for his development record and for bringing hope especially to the people of South Nyanza. *Wuod Bade Boyo* is a song of praise for Dalmas Otieno Anyango of Rongo, for bringing optimism to the fish industry in the region. The basis for Misiani's praise of such individuals through songs is not only due to what he considers as their achievements in their communities or constituencies but also a campaign instrument for these individuals, most of whom are politicians. He is thus motivated by the desire to have these individuals elected at election time.

Change of tactic: from controversy to support for the Government

Due to his frequent commentaries on political events through his songs some of which have been seen as anti-government, Misiani has had a number of tribulations at the hands of incumbent regimes. Due to the reprisals dogging his musical career, Misiani was compelled to change tact in the presentation and rhetoric of his music changing from controversial songs condemning the government to straightforward songs in support of the government of the day. His political overtures likewise changed from criticism to praise of the political system. This was first exemplified in the song *Kenya I love you* released in 1988. This was in praise of Kenya and the ruling party KANU which was given glowing tribute, for example in the Kiswahili song there is a claim that “*Kenya alama ya KANU*,” which means KANU was synonymous with nationhood. The fact that the song was sang in Kiswahili was a clear indication of a wider target audience than his dominant fan base amongst the Luo.

As confirmation that he had changed from a government critic to a fervent supporter of the government and KANU, Misiani belts out, “*Nime fuata nyayo—wanao ubiri maneno ya uwongo sio wanakenya*.” In this line Misiani claims that opposition advocates are not nationalists and therefore do not have the interests of Kenya at heart. Other conformity lyrics in the song include “*Mungu bariki Kenya na Moi aendelee kuongoza Kenya tusonge mbele na maendeleo*.” Here he asks to bless Kenya and Moi and enable him to continue leading Kenya towards greater prosperity. The timing of Misiani’s change of heart came at a time that the autocracy of the Moi regime was at its apex and the level of indoctrination had reached unmatched heights. Misiani had to survive not only the harassment but also maintain a livelihood. At the time, it appeared that the only way to do this was to toe the party line. He was remarkably successful on so doing for in the same year 1988 he released *Mungu Ibariki Kenya* that was even more pro-government. However it is unclear whether this change of attitude was real or merely expedient. In this song he praises Moi and KANU for bringing ‘development.’ Among the indicators he cites as evidence of this development are the afforestation programme, Nyayo Bus project, Nyayo wards, expansion

of national universities and school milk programmes for primary schools. Again this song is in Kiswahili to attract a wider audience. The use of Kiswahili also depicts Misiani as a musician struggling to shed the image of Luo community mouthpiece for the image of advocate for all Kenyans.

Return to controversy

The pro-democracy movement beginning of the 1990s led to the 1992 multi-party elections. It also opened up the political space thus ensuring a more conducive environment for citizens to articulate their views without intimidation. Among the beneficiaries in this epoch was Misiani who once again significantly altered the content of his songs. After his short stint of flattery of the Moi regime Misiani reverted to his original style. The release of *Boluma* in 1994 was the first testimony of a return to his controversial compositions. In any case the return to multi-partyism was accompanied by a proliferation of political and socio-economic issues that Misiani had a luxury of choosing from for his compositions. *Boluma* is based on the 1992 elections that the opposition lost due to divisions within its ranks as well as the subsequent battle for control of FORD-Kenya after the demise of its founding chairman Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. Misiani laments that mainstream Kenya lost the battle in the 1992 elections and blames it on greed amongst political leaders. However he reserves his harshest words for the Kikuyu community. “*Yawa tinde utero yo ugwe moko be uwito ka ularo telo e ich lach. Yawa de ubede ka uparo ni gino ok nwang’ diriyo*”. Here he tells the Kikuyu that they cannot get power twice before other communities have had a chance. In his view, it is the Kikuyu and their selfishness that led to the split of FORD which may have been in a position to dislodge KANU from power. He also points out the need for unity among “*kiseru mamalo gi mwalo nam* —the Luo and Luhya. He reiterates an appeal that was made with the in-fighting in FORD-Kenya between Raila (Luo) and Wamalwa (Luhya) in mind. He observes that this was the only way to defeat *jokakwach* (the Kikuyu, herdsman). He dwells heavily on the Wamalwa/Raila feud over leadership of FORD-Kenya and ends with a plea to both leaders to unite the two communities to enhance their chances of attaining power.

In the 1995 release *Njawo par ng'ato*, Misiani criticises what he viewed as the defilement and desecration of homes of independence heroes. This was a reference to police raids that disrupted the first anniversary of the death of Jaramogi Odinga. At this event, armed security men unleashed terror on all and sundry sending visitors fleeing from the homestead of the late doyen of opposition politics. Another popular Luo benga musician, the late Okatch Biggy, also composed a song on the same scuffle, *Nyathi Nyakach* but in his version the political overtones were characteristically missing in his lyrics. This demonstrates Misiani's penchant for political overtures as the centrepiece of his music. Although the two musicians sang about the same incident, they create two completely different impressions. In analysing the incident Okatch sees the police as high-handedly disrupting a cultural event that is sacred among the Luo and regards it as just another case of police brutality. Misiani on the other hand, sees a political hand in the events as well as a lack of respect for Jaramogi, even in death. He concludes that the Kenya government had failed to appreciate Jaramogi's contribution to the political developments in the country and that any other civilized country would clearly have crowned him hero. In Misiani's view, these and many other atrocities such as detention without trial, arbitrary arrests of citizens with dissenting opinions and torture of suspects only help to alienate the citizenry from the government.

In *Le Tinde Mor Te* released in 2003, Misiani addresses the 2002 KANU–NDP merger. While he laments that the Luo sold out their birthright by the merger “*jokagweno*” (KANU) to the delight of the latter, he marvels that KANU forgot to switch off the engine of the tractor thus creating intense discomfort within KANU. The reference to the tractor is deciphered from the nickname of Raila Odinga who is in political circles referred to as *Tinga* meaning tractor. He credits Raila with the formation of the Rainbow Alliance which not only weakened KANU but played a key role in uniting the opposition to depose KANU from power. He also refers to the tumultuous moments that Moi faced during the hand-over ceremony. In a veiled reminder to his audience that his previous praise (a decade and a half ago) was out of convenience rather than conviction, he revels in the fact that citizens expressed their dissatisfaction with Moi during Kibaki's inauguration by throwing mud and “*yugi*” (waste) at him. He also outlines some of the ills that Moi

presided over while he was in power. He asserts that the money that was looted while Moi was in power must be returned to the country and no sympathy should be extended to his accomplices. He also asserts that truth about the killings and murders that occurred under Moi's regime be unravelled and those found guilty be incarcerated. Misiani further shows his distaste for Moi and gets personal in reference to Moi's marital problems with his estranged wife Lena. He infers that she was waiting to torment and curse him, now that he was no longer the president of Kenya, "*rito chwade gi afuong'o, afuong'o thiedho tek.*"

Misiani also proclaims in the song that everything has its nadir, hence the end of Moi's reign of terror. "*In be ka ichezo (Kibaki) to imoko etol*" warns the current president, Kibaki that Kenyans are keenly watching him and if he negates the people's wishes, he will end up like Moi in the political cold. He insists that the only way Kibaki can survive in power is to rely on Raila as this will guarantee his survival and also ensure that he reigns unperturbed and hence enjoy the fruits of power. As if to prove his point, he indicates that Moi's project (the candidature of Uhuru for president) failed because he did not listen to Raila's advice. Misiani sings that Raila is the darling of everybody within and outside Kenya. The impression he creates in this song is that for any leader in Kenya to acquire or sustain power, he must peg his hopes on Raila due to his political prowess and mobilisation skills. The song title means all animals are happy now. This is an indication that NARC has room for all communities and this depicts a reduction in hatred and animosity between individuals and communities. The most enormous gain for him in this development was that of the Luo overcoming their hatred for the Kikuyu and backing Kibaki—a Kikuyu candidate—in order to wrest power from Moi and KANU.

In the song *Rainbow* also released in 2003 Misiani heaps more praises on Raila's wit and credits the defeat of KANU entirely to him. He warns Raila's adversaries to tread with care lest they lose his goodwill since the majority of Kenyans support him. He blames the defeat of KANU on Moi's reneging on his earlier agreement with Raila. According to Misiani, in course of the co-operation between KANU and NDP, Moi had promised to hand over power to Raila. He observes that Moi however renounced this promise after taking another oath with Mama Ngina Kenyatta. This oath was the reason for Moi's change of heart because of

this decision, the Luo were obliged to reject him, “*Jokanyanam nyaka wite*.” The country, he asserts, belongs to all Kenya and is not Moi’s personal property as he may have envisaged. In condemning Moi for short-changing Raila, Misiani even infers that Moi had inherited Mama Ngina Kenyatta. Wife-inheritance is common among the Luo and he uses this cultural symbol to infer that inheriting a wife from a distant land has its shortcomings. This is what he means when he says Moi has inherited a wife from too distant a place.

Misiani returns to controversial songs with his number, *Bim en Bim* (a baboon is always a baboon), also released in 2003 after the formation of the Kibaki government. In this song Misiani laments and condemns the failure by the Kibaki regime to honour the memorandum of understanding that the NAK and LDP had entered into, which resulted in the creation of NARC. It is on the basis of NARC that a 50–50 power-sharing formula had been worked out. The song depicts a renewed rivalry between the Kikuyu and the Luo communities. It portrays the Kikuyu as a community that cannot be trusted. The song personifies *Bim* (baboon) to mean the Kikuyu as reflected in the person of Kibaki. Using animals as images for diverse Kenyan communities and their ethnic composition, Misiani again masterfully captures the unfolding political scenario. The animals of choice in this song are “*winyo, rech, kod gik malak, bimbe kod ong’èche*” (birds, fish, snakes, baboons and monkeys). According to Misiani, made-made objects do not last forever—“*meli, ndege, ot*” (ship, airplanes, houses) all have their demise date. He compares this with the NARC government, which he also infers will not last forever. He asserts that god made his creation in the same way and none can escape death. But he also asserts that an animal or human being has been created in such a way that it retains its identity and habits irrespective of natural or scientific intervention. He argues that baboons and monkeys, whether domesticated or wild always behave in similar fashion. Misiani uses this analogy to dramatize the unfolding political events in the country in the countdown to the 2002 elections and its aftermath. The baboons and monkeys—in this case the Gema communities led by the Kikuyu—are selfish and that whatever one may innocently offer them, they tend to take as their right and also as if they have sole ownership.

The bone of contention in this song is that in the pre-election period,

the Luo were naive in warming up to their perennial adversaries, the Kikuyu. He observes that among the opposition ranks, although Raila was the most deserving individual to become president, he suppressed his ambitions and handed Kibaki the presidency. In return, the Kikuyu stabbed him in the back once Kibaki had been sworn in. Misiani feels that the Kikuyu betrayed the trust that had been bestowed on them by Kenyans, and therefore dismisses them as jealous and mean people, unwilling to share power with other Kenyans. He recites in the song that Raila had campaigned for Kibaki even as he lay in a hospital bed indisposed after a car accident. He believes Kibaki and the Kikuyu have no gratitude as they have broken most of the promises that united the opposition. In Misiani's words, after Kibaki was sworn in he turned his back on Raila, becoming like a dog and sheep that do not see eye to eye. Raila rescued the 'Baboon' (Kibaki) after it sustained injuries, and took him to hospital. , After the baboon recovered, Raila accorded him shelter in his home (the presidency), allowing him to take care of the home when he was still in bandages and immobile. In due course, he brought in all his tribesmen. This is a clear reference to the Mt Kenya 'mafia' which is seen as dominating government and reaping the benefits of the presidency at the expense of the other coalition partners. He also notes that Raila and his Luo community, who bore a significant portion of the brunt of the second liberation, are now like strangers in State House and they are treated with disdain by their Kikuyu counterparts. The Kikuyu, he claims, have now completely taken over the government and are reaping where they did not sow. In line with his wild animal metaphor he asserts that different types and species are incapable of intermarrying and living happily together as husband and wife. Here he suggests that despite all the tribes in the country living under the banner of one identity as Kenyans, there is incompatibility between the tribes, particularly the Kikuyu against the rest.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Misiani is one of Kenya's household names in pop music hence the reference to him as the King of Benga. The beauty of his music is mainly attributed to his brilliant use of proverbs and other types of cultural idioms to define and frame responses to the

political experiences of the day. Misiani thus not only entertains but also educates and makes predictions through his songs. He thus creates an action-oriented consciousness among his audience. Furthermore Misiani's cultural definition of a political response has always been apt, eloquent, and critical in its symbolic representations. This has always landed him in problems with successive Kenyan governments. However, Misiani conveniently belongs to the Luo of the northern Mara district in Tanzania, to which he hibernates after releasing politically sensitive musical pieces.

Misiani's music is used as a forum for a community presenting itself as oppressed and subordinated. It also expresses the tribulations of the same community at the hands of a rival community that it perceives as untrustworthy. His music thus becomes the base of a hidden message and opposition to the target community. He provides an avenue through which the political sentiments of the Luo community can be expressed. His songs have had a double-edged effect—to mobilise the Luo community on pertinent issues and at the same time disparage the government of the day.

Arising from the above there is one school of thought that considers his songs as geared towards perpetuating ethnic animosity. However, this is countered by another school of thought that sees nothing wrong with the songs as they accurately capture the unfolding political events in Kenya and their impact on the Luo community. Misiani's summations have continued to systematically reflect the reality of the turbulence in Kenyan politics. In their own way, his songs have contributed to the struggle for political change and in expressing the tribulations of the Luo community at the hands of successive Kenyan regimes.

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Orature of Combat: Cultural Aesthetics of Song as Political Action in the Performance of the Mau Mau Songs

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When Carothers (1954) wrote that:

Social conformity was not here so dominant a note, and it is perhaps significant in this connexion that Tracey, in a study of African music several years ago, found less music among the Kikuyu than in any other East African tribe he studied... (1954: 5)

... it was part of his duty as a hired anti-Mau Mau propagandist of the colonial government. As such, it was in total disregard of the reality and of what other White settlers had hitherto recorded. Scoresby and Routledge had, 44 years earlier, recorded their observations about the Gikuyu community and their musicality:

The Akikuyu as a race are gifted with the musical ear. Their songs are almost always improvised solos with a chorus sung to a well-known air. Some hundreds of persons, strangers to one another, will join in a song with a dash and precision of a trained choir. The rhythmical movements of their dances, too, show their marked sense of musical time. By song and dance they give expression to their emotions with a spontaneity that is quite foreign to us. (Routledge and Routledge, 1910: 111)

It is evident that music was an important anchor in Gikuyu orature and performance art, and a preferred way of social comment and analysis. In this analysis, the term 'performance' as opposed to 'theatre' is used because, in my view, it is inclusive of extra-Aristotlean criteria for tragedy as a dramatic frame. In this sense 'performance' is not restricted to the lineal narrative flow with a tragic 'hero', and with the aim of effecting a catharsis on the part of the audience. Rather,

performance is a response to stimuli in life experience with a conscious aim of arousing the consciousness of the intended ‘audience’ to respond to the stimuli both reactively and proactively. The ‘audience’ in this respect is not therefore the passive group of a theatric presentation, but a group deliberately expected to participate in the encompassing experience. As Frances Harding says of the Tiv (of Nigeria) performance as political action during the years of colonial rule, “... *There is very little fictionalisation in such performances and any conceptual line dividing the ordinary everyday action and reaction from the performed action is deliberately interwoven.*” (1990: 17)

The view expressed in this paper is that the non-fictionalised function of the Mau Mau songs has attributes of both ritual and drama—efficacious and entertaining. Ritual and drama is referred to in the Soyinkan sense of ‘cleansing, binding, communal, re-creative force’ that encapsulates dramatic representation of experience as ‘a communal evolution of the dramatic mode of expression’ (1976). It is an expression of communal history, morality, affirmation, challenges and aspirations, and an expression with a conscious aspiration towards a re-constructive efficacy. In reference to the performability of the Mau Mau songs, the argument here is that the choice of song as an artistic genre and as a performance mode clearly underlines the conscious intention of an entertainment quality. By the virtue of the form, a functional aesthetics is targeted, which appeals to both the rational and emotive senses. No meaningful cultural-historical reconstruction (the essence of anti-colonial struggles) can occur without the conscious involvement of the body, mind and soul. The aesthetics in the Mau Mau songs functioned as a carrier of hope, and a celebration of a triumphal future. The sanguine rendition of threnody in this artistic respect is therefore nothing but a conviction of triumph.

Another important aspect of the performability of the Mau Mau songs is the relation of the performance to the meaning and use of space. As with the Tiv, so with the Mau Mau freedom fighters, “*it is not possible [...] to consider the use of performance [...] as political action displayed or transformed into ‘play’*” (Harding, 1990: 174). And if the reason for this is partly the fact that the Mau Mau songs were modelled along Gikuyu traditional art forms like the *Rwimbo*—which translates both as, ‘to sing’ and ‘to dance’, “*In Gikuyu the verb ‘kuina’*

means to sing, to dance, to perform a dance. In the Gikuyu cultural milieu song and dance are, generally speaking, not separable, so even the phrase 'kuina rwimbo' translates as both to sing (a song) and to perform a dance..." (Gititi, 1995: 122)—the prevailing reason was the banning of these performances by the colonial government. This had adverse implications on the politics of performance space. This point is fully illustrated in Peter Ukpokodu's words,

The colonial theatrical legacy had been strengthened in Kenya by the banning of such traditional performances as Ituika, Kanyegenyuri and Muthirigu, the replacement of the empty space, participatory, tactile productions by buildings that not only separated actors from audience but made it possible, during the Kenyan war of Independence, for the government to supervise mass gatherings and to ensure that only innocuous, pro-government comedies were staged. (1998: 39)

Harding states that performance and politics are two dimensions of the same struggle for access to power (1990). This opinion can be syncretized with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's, that "*the war between art and the state is really a struggle between the power of performance in the arts and the performance of power by the state—in short, enactments of power*" (1998: 38). Ngugi sees this confrontation of 'enactments of power' taking place at the performance space, where the performance of power (gunpoints) interferes with the power of performance (penpoints), resulting in censorship, banning and all. He therefore concludes that "...it is often not so much a question of what happens or could happen on the stage at any one time, but rather the control of continuous access and contact. (1998: 40–1).

With the banning of indigenous performance arts, the meaning of space radically changed, and the legacy of 'where two are gathered' was put into gear to create performance spaces. At work, in schools, on the streets, at home, in prison, and in the bush, people would sing songs of protest, "*it was a general grassroot-based performance of protest*" (Ngugi, 1998: 47). This form of protest took root even in the educational field. African indigenous schools were started by the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association, (KISA) and the Kikuyu Karing'a Educational Association, (KKEA). The achievements of this educational movement culminated with the establishment of Githunguri African Teachers College headed by Mbiyu wa Koinange, (a Columbia University

graduate). These schools became a threat to the colonial government and like the creative arts, they were proscribed. Ngugi aptly sums up this situation, saying, “*African-run schools were closed down because they were seen as performance sites for the nationalist forces*” (1998: 47).

From then on, whatever the circumstances people found themselves in, they protested, affirming performance as freedom and asserted the superiority of the creative arts and the imagination. Space ceased to mean merely a physical acting area, but the Soyinkan “*spatial medium [...] as a manageable contraction of the cosmic envelope within which man [...] fearfully exists*” (1976: 41).

Conscious that theirs was a political as well as a cultural war, (against political colonialism and cultural imperialism), the Mau Mau put as much effort in composing liberation songs for community mobilisation, as they did in making home-made guns. Amílcar Cabral, as if in answer to Frantz Fanon’s rhetorical question, ‘is the struggle for liberation a cultural phenomena or not?’ (1965), affirms that “*if imperialist domination has the vital need to practise cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture*” (1980).

The Aesthetics of Gikuyu Orature in the Mau Mau Songs

The form of the Mau Mau songs was influenced by Gikuyu orature. The word ‘orature’ in this case refers to the cosmos of performance arts, and the fusion of these art forms. Performance is a central aspect of the oral arts, and an aspect that realises the full potential of any oral imaginative product be it a riddle, song, story, poem, myth, legend, proverb or even a dance. The well-developed system of oral aesthetics is captured and nurtured within performance. Pio Zirimu (that Ugandan theorist who coined the word ‘orature’), defines it as ‘the use of utterance as an aesthetic means of expression’ (as quoted by Ngugi wa Thiong’o, 1998).

It is a ‘means of expression’ that connotes a system of aesthetics in its methodology and philosophy, whose source of knowledge is essentially oral—oral literature, oral history, oral spirituality, all of which are determinants in a people’s way of life. To this end, orature is a great

legacy of the Gikuyu lifestyle. It is the well from which every profession draws; the philosopher, the spiritual, the politician, the social worker, the teacher, the parent, indeed the entire community. Ngugi captures this in one sentence; “*the spirituality of any society is best expressed through its speechuality*” (1998: 126).

Unlike the literal tradition, the oral tradition trains one to be sharp, fast and quick on the uptake in responding spontaneously to a given situation. Spontaneity as the hallmark of orature captures the power of the moment. The time to reflect and order words in a ‘tablet’ essentially reduces the pithiness. During the Kenyan freedom struggle, the Mau Mau guerrilla fighters responded to the attacks with their guns and their ‘speechuality’. Most of their songs were composed at the battlefield capturing the ‘power of the moment’. An example of a song sang as the fighters marched into the battle ground is as follows:

*And you who are sleeping
Wake up now!
Follow the revolutionary path
Remember that only through unity in struggle
Shall we be able to liberate our land.*

*Seize the time!
Make haste now!
Join the struggle for land
And never betray the African people.* (Kinyatti, 1980)

Even during danger of being captured by the enemy forces, the moment was recorded in song,

*The one lying down in the picture
Is Kago wa Mboko
He shoots down the enemy warplanes
That harass and bomb Murang’a.* (Kinyatti, 1980)

The centrality of orature to the performance arts demands a niche by itself and should not be classified merely as a component of literature. Richard Schechner argues that it is more fruitful to consider theatre alongside related activities like play, games, music, sports, dance, and ritual rather than alongside literature (1985). In the same vein, Ngugi argues, “*drama and written texts belong to literature, while theatre, music and various kinds of performative genres belong to orature*” (1998: 118).

Orature draws from its environment like the sea whose waters are fed by a myriad of sources. The aesthetic framework of orature is therefore a confluence of a plethora of performance arts that draw their imaginative power from all the other arts. It is within the fusionary characteristics of orature that a song is sculptured and a sculpture sings, a mime becomes a myth and a myth is mimed. Pitika Ntuli encapsulates the holistic nature of orature,

Orature is more than a fusion of all art forms. It is the conception and reality of a total view of life. It is the capsule of feeling, thinking, imagination, taste and hearing. It is the flow of a creative spirit. Within sculpture alone, it is stone, wood, found objects, metal, shells. In poetry it is not the images but also their presentation. Orature is the universe of expression and appreciation and a fusion of both within one individual, a group, a community. It is the beginning come full circle on a higher plane. It is a gem, an idea, a reality that beckons us to be part of it. (Ntuli, 1988: 215).

The Gikuyu cultural milieu like other African cultures is embodied in orature. Every aspect of the Gikuyu life found expression in orature. The history of the people is stored, restored and expressed through orature, as much as the socio-educational process was modelled within an oral aesthetic. Cultural rites, ritual practices, spiritual ceremonies and council gatherings were all conducted in an oral performative framework.

The birth of a child was greeted with song and dance, and so was every other rite relating to that child up to and including his or her funeral. Jomo Kenyatta elaborated this aspect of the Gikuyu life in his book *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938). For example, he explains the importance of *Irua* as a rite of passage. *Irua* was the circumcision rite marking the start of participation in the community administration. It is from *Irua* that age-groups were formed, and therefore the ceremony would involve the naming of the age-group being initiated. This rite of passage was celebrated and conducted in song and dance, a performance called *Mambura* that Kenyatta translates as ‘rituals or divine services’.

In the same oral framework, Kenyatta explains how a marriage ceremony was conducted. Of particular interest is the stage when the groom’s family visits the bride’s home to begin marriage negotiations. They would normally bring with them *njoohi ya njuuriu* (the beer for asking for the girl’s hand), and after all the other formalities, the

‘conversation regarding their future son- or daughter-in-law is carried on in *proverbs*’ (author’s emphasis).

The *Ituika* ceremony is the procedure of handing-over power from one council of the ruling age-group to another. This was celebrated in a six-month span and was marked by song and dance. From the very first *Njama ya Ituika* (Revolutionary Council), Kenyatta records that “*all the words of the drafted constitution were put in song-phrases, for as there was no system of writing*” (1938: 1920). In proclaiming a new government Kenyatta further says,

It was considered that the effective way of proclaiming the new government was to call for war dances to be held in every district, in order to give the population an opportunity of hearing the announcement of the new constitution ... for it was the only way through which the words, phrases and rhythmic movements of the new songs and dances, in which the laws and regulations of the new democratic government were embodied, could be introduced effectively in the life of the community. (1938: 193)

Songs were used in all aspects of life. There were cultivation songs, work songs, initiation songs, war or warrior songs, and songs to commemorate historical events, like the *Ituika* constitutional and revolutionary songs. If in the Chinua Achebe’s world “*proverbs are the palm wine with which words are eaten*” then among the Gikuyu songs are the ‘palm wine’ with which discourse is ‘eaten’. In referring to the songs it should be borne in mind that it is in the description of the song form as both the singing of a song and performance of a dance. If the Gikuyu used songs to educate, mobilise, conduct rituals and ceremonies, mourn and sing praises, these expressions found a place in the Mau Mau songs during the war of liberation.

When the Mau Mau fighters began the armed struggle they used *muma* (oath) as a rite of passage. As mentioned earlier, the *Muma wa Batuni* (the platoon oath) triggered the guerrilla warfare. The taking of an oath is a Gikuyu cultural phenomenon. It was used in sealing and showing allegiance to a covenant, as well as in the administration of justice and in matters involving land and property. Kenyatta elaborates that the oath was the most important factor in the court procedures, as it had the effect of ensuring that people did not give evidence to false witness, and it put bribery and corruption in check to ensure impartial and unbiased judgement. He further goes ahead to mention that an

everlasting oath would be to swear by the earth.

The Mau Mau oath-taking ceremonies are hence traced to that traditional Gikuyu practice and clearly captured in the songs. The following song records the commitment of the fighters, even to the point of death.

*Just before his death
Gitau Matenjagwo put a handful of soil
In his mouth
And with his clenched fist held skyward,
He said: 'I am dying as an African hero'. (Kinyatti, 1980: 101).*

As well as indicating the oath Matenjagwo had taken to defend his country to the death, the singing of this song in itself becomes a renewal of the same oath for the other fighters who would carry on with the struggle.

Within the Mau Mau framework both as an underground movement and after the transformation into the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, an imminent problem was the infiltration of the *thuthi* and the *tai-tai*—the traitors, the colonial government collaborators. There was only one way of dealing with these traitors and collaborators, as Dedan Kimathi once said, “*Let us make this very clear: If one of the KAU¹²⁸ leaders or anybody else gets in our way, we will cut him down just the same way we have done to those who stood in our way*”(In Kinyatti, 1980: 79).

Maina Kinyatti in *Mau Mau: A Revolution Betrayed* recalls that the assassinations of Senior Chiefs Waruhiu and Nderi and pro-colonial collaborators like Ofafa and Tom Mbotela were seen as great victories for the movement. Songs were composed to commemorate this victory.

*I will never sell out the country
Or love money more than my country
Waruhiu sold out his own country (for money)
But he died and left the money. (Kinyatti, ... Revolution Betrayed)*

Another example :

Remember Nderi and Waruhiu

¹²⁸ It should be noted that some of the radical political activists were suspicious of the Kenya African Union (KAU), fearing it may be a government instrument through Eliud Mathu who was a nominated member of the Colonial Legislative Council. See Kaggia, B. *Roots of Freedom*, p. 15.

Mbotela and Ofafa
After they sold the country for money
Where are they now? (Kinyatti, 1980: 41)

The oath was not only used as a sign of commitment to the struggle against colonial domination but also as a commitment, devotion and sacrifice to fight unto death for the return of the land and freedom. This is clearly stated in the wordings of the *Batuni* oath.

I speak the truth and swear before Ngai (God) and before everyone present here. And by this Batuni oath of Muingi (the Movement), That if called upon to fight for our land, To shed my blood for it, I shall obey and never surrender. And if I fail to do so: May this oath kill me! (Njama, 1966: 67).

The Mau Mau songs were composed from a tradition accustomed to the flexibility of oral poetry and poetic form that permits textual manipulation for specific intended objectives. This textual manipulation allows for the expression of personal feelings, political and social matters through allusion rather than by direct statement. Consider the following stanza:

Chege wa Kiburu prophesied
That when the thingira at Wairera
Will be built and ready
We would surely get back our freedom. (Kinyatti, 1980: 15)

Chege wa Kiburu was a Gikuyu prophet who had prophesised the coming of the white man. *Thingira* is a special hut that every man has in a Gikuyu homestead in which he performs important functions. The *Thingira* at Wairera that is being referred to in the song is the Kenya Teacher's College—one of the institutions run by the Kikuyu Karing'a Education Association. It was destroyed by the British forces during the Mau Mau war. The song therefore alludes to self-determination as the essence of freedom. Freedom will be achieved when the indigenous people are able to run their own institutions, educational as well as political.

There is a direct link between the Mau Mau songs of resistance and Gikuyu oral song-poetry of resistance. In mapping out the origin of the *Ituika* ceremony, Kenyatta elaborates how the Gikuyu people revolted

against the authoritarian rule of King Gikuyu, led by the *Iregi* generation. *Iregi* is a word derived from the verb *rega*, which means ‘refuse’ or ‘revolt’. It is therefore used to refer to the generation that revolted against oppression. In writing the novel, *Matigari*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o reckons that the Mau Mau (the *Iregi* of the colonial period) and their progeny *matigari ma njirungi*—those who survived the bullets—(the *Iregi* of the neo-colonial period) are logical descendants of the *Iregi* generation. Ngugi wa Thiong’o reminisces on this in his prison notes *Detained*,

In literature, the energy found creative expression in the many patriotic songs, poems, plays and dances over the years, giving rise to a great patriotic literary tradition of Kenyan poetry and theatre. There was for instance the Ituika, a revolutionary cultural festival among the Aagikuyu which was enacted every twenty-five years both as a ceremony transferring power from one generation to the other; and as a communal renewal of their commitment to a struggle against tyrants, as their forefathers the Iregi generation had done. The Iregi was a generation of revolutionary rebels, who had overthrown the corrupt dictatorial regime of King Gikuyu, established ruling councils and established the procedure for handing over power, an event commemorated in the Ituika festival of music, dance, poetry and theatre. The last such festival was held towards the end of the nineteenth century. The next, due in about 1930, was banned by the colonial overlords as a threat to public peace and order. (1981: 65).

This history of resistance is celebrated in Gikuyu art forms, and particularly in the *Gicaandi* poetry as shown by Gitahi Gititi in quoting Mukabi Kabira and Karega Mutahi,

Kuuma Wanyahoro guuka

Gutiiri Kiama giukiiti

No kiria kia Iregi na Muuriu (Mukabi Kabira and Karega Mutahi, 1988: 167)

Since the arrival of Wanyahoro

No (new) party has arisen

Except that of Iregi and his descendants. (Gitahi Gititi’s translation, 1995: 126)

Gicaandi is a Gikuyu form of oral poetry performed and sang, accompanied with a musical instrument, itself called *gicaandi*. Vittorio Merlo Pick who has recorded in print an extensive *gicaandi* text is drawn to this particular genre by its ethnological value. In his words, “... *It is made up of elegantly elaborated enigmas, which were sung by two people in competition. The song was accompanied by the shaking of a kind of a rattle, itself called gicandi, (sic) ...*” (Merlo Pick, 1973: 18).

The complex *gicaandi* form is a duet performance of contestation in song and dance, and whose dialogics are engagements in riddling—what Merlo Pick has called ‘enigmas.’ In elaborating the performative essence of *gicaandi*, Gitahi Gititi clarifies,

The oral/aural dimension of gicaandi is part of its inscription/creation. Performance is conveyed through the act of kuina gicaandi—both ‘singing’ and extemporaneous (but not haphazard) creation of verse. Uini (performance in its entirety) consists of ‘rhythming’, ‘poetry-making’, (dependent on a sense of movement, balance, structure) and prosody. (Gititi, 1995: 122).

The performance of *gicaandi* necessitates participation, and being a form in contestation dialogics, the participation is both at the interpersonal level as well as at the collective level. The performance takes place in the open and lasts as long as it takes. During the performance, members of the community will be involved at all levels. For example the performers are allowed to take a break during which food and drink may be served. At the same time, the performer is allowed to consult with the members of the public present on whatever issue is in contestation. Discourse is therefore not just limited to the contesting performers but is open to all those present. A *gicaandi* event “*taking place in the public square, is not only a performance but a site of a performance, providing a model for interpersonal and public discourse.*” (Gititi, 1995: 124).

Gititi goes further to elaborate that the relation between performer and collective participation is congenitally dramatised in the exchange where one *muini wa gicaandi* (one who performs *gicaandi*) enjoins the other to, *Nyambikira ngeithi, amu ndingihota utambikite* (Start the weaving of the *ngeithi* for me, for I cannot begin without your collaboration). [The fellow *muini* responds with a most with complex formulation of the communal ethos within which *gicaandi* is performed]: *Mutumi wa kiondo. Mwambiriria wa uhandi. Mugo agikunurwo ambiririe ugo akiambiriria na ndawoine.* (Merlo Pick, 1973: 297). (The weaver of a string basket. The young girl who ritually initiates the season’s planting of the seed. The diviner/medicine man, when he is first “initiated,” has no prior experience [Gititi’s translation, 1995: 124]).

In this metaphorical reference to collectivity, the *gicaandi* performer challenges his competing partner to start ‘weaving *ngeithi*’ (greetings). *Ngeithi* is not simply in reference to greetings as the word means, but a

reference to the subject, or the point of view that launches the discourse to be 'weaved'. The response 'a young girl who ritually initiates the season's planting of the seed' is derived from the ritual practice at the beginning of a planting season. In the Gikuyu tradition, a ram was always sacrificed and its fat sprinkled on 'new' seeds to be planted, thereafter a young girl was blessed by the elders and delegated to begin the planting. The crop having been blessed and the earth appeased to bring forth a bountiful harvest, the rest of the community would then go ahead to plant their seeds. The *gicaandi* performer is thence metaphorically referring to the eventual collectivity, which was begun by one person.

The Mau Mau songs in formative similarity to the *gicaandi* alluded to this kind of collectivity. In referring to the importance of 'collectivity' (unity) in the 'weaving of the basket' (the fight for land and freedom) they used this *gicaandi* metaphor in the following song,

Kiondo Kiambirwo ni Kenyatta wa Muigai
Muingi ukiogothora ndigi
Mau Mau igitiriha
Kamuingi koyaga ndiri
Kiondo kiambirwo

The weaving of the basket was started by Kenyatta wa Muigai
 The masses interlaced the strings
 Mau Mau finished up the weaving
 Collectively the mortar is easily lifted
 The basket was thus woven.

This rich form of *gicaandi* poetry, largely influenced the composition of the Mau Mau songs. The songs are replete with a metaphorical language, and like the *gicaandi*, they were composed to engage the masses in the collective effort of national liberation. In singing these songs, the guerrilla fighters and the masses were staging a performance of protest and transforming their environment into 'sites of this performance of protest'. If in *gicaandi* the revolt against the authoritarian rule of King Gikuyu was registered, then it was in *muthirigu* that the revolt against colonial domination was expressed.

There are indications that *muthirigu* was composed and first sung by the students of the Native Industrial Training Depot (NITD). (cf. Sandgren, 1989; Gakaara wa Wanjau, 1971). It was a result of a widespread

revolt against the missionary's imposition of the Christian religion, while they suppressed and outlawed indigenous religious practices. It was also a protest against the settlers and colonial government's land grabbing. Sandgren records an instance when Gikuyu elders were arrested and detained after conducting a ritual sacrifice to appease *Ngai* (God) so that rain would fall at a time that the Gikuyu were faced with drought and the beginning of serious famine conditions. Christian evangelisation caused religious and ideological rifts among the Gikuyu and as a result there were converts who aligned themselves with the missionaries. These converts were referred to as *kirore* (thumbprints), for endorsing missionary religion and settler/colonial laws. It was these *Kirore* types of characters who were made 'chiefs' over the Gikuyu people (Edgerton, 1990).

Muthirigu as a song-dance registered the rejection of the *kirore*, and Gakaara wa Wanjau says that it was a song full of innuendo for the traitors. Their names were called out during the singing, as the people who had sold the land cheaply to the colonialists (1970: 52). It was a song performed to the rhythm and accompaniment of 'movement, bell and drum' (Sandgren, 1989), and in short pithy innuendo remarks aimed at the traitors, missionaries and colonial settlers. Gakaara records the following stanzas,

Tutiri uthu na mundu muthuuri na munyendi
Mundu ndi uthu nake no mwendia wa githaka

Nitwendirio mbia ti itheru na ti nguthi,
Hamwe na githaka, ni Thoroko wa Njahi

Ndagitari ni muthungu, D.C. ni muthungu,
Nawe Ruriyo Ngwaci, rui wa kabira iriku. (Wanjau, 1971: 54–5)

I have no enmity with whoever hates me or loves me
 My enmity is with the one who sold the land

We were sold cheaply, it's not a joke
 Together with our land, by Thoroko wa Njahi

The doctor is white, the D.C. is a white
 And you, Ruriyo Ngwaci, to which race do you belong?

Muthirigu was a direct and immediate predecessor to the Mau Mau song. Even after it was banned, people continued singing it in secret. Gakaara has indicated that members of the movement like the *Anake*

40 (the 40 group) continued using it. Indeed some Mau Mau songs that were composed during the war are similar in form to the *muthirigu*, even in their reference to traitors.

*Who has eyes and can't see?
It is he who cannot see for the nation.*

*Who is it that has ears and cannot hear?
It is he who cannot hear for the nation.*

*Who is it that travels and never arrives?
It is he who cannot walk for the nation.*

*Wuui, Wuui, Africans shall we perish one by one?
Wuui, Wuui, shall we watch passively,
While we are being exterminated? (Kinyatti, 1980: 41)*

At the heart of the Mau Mau songs was an idiom appropriated and adapted from the people's traditions and history to combat and articulate the pressing issues of the day, and which was a binding force of a people and a culture under siege.

The songs captured and expressed the daily use of riddles, proverbs and metaphors. Riddles required a response from the masses in the form of joining the struggle, whether at the level of going to the battlefield, or support for the battalion. The Mau Mau fighters, having no support base from outside the country, entirely relied on the support from the masses for the provision of food, shelter, clothing and any other material need. In the following song, the riddle of the 'Gikuyu book' is the Mau Mau movement.

*The book of Gikuyu is holy
It helps me to be honest
It is my political guide
When I join the people's army*

*The book is 'Mau Mau'
It shows me the way
To fight the liberation of my country
And free it from British slavery.*

*The book will guide me
So that I persist to love
My country all my life.*

*If I accept its guidelines
I will never be called 'boy' again
I will get freedom through Mau Mau. (Kinyatti, 1980: 43)*

The language of the songs was full of metaphorical reference. Joseph Kamaru, in a recording of the Mau Mau songs sings,

*Riria Kimathi witu ambatiire
Kirimaini ari wiki
Niaheirwo hinya na umiriru
Wa kuhoota nyakeru. (Kamaru, Nyimbo cia Mau Mau—Mau Mau songs, vol. 1)*

When our Kimathi ascended
Up the mountain unaccompanied
He was empowered with strength and courage
To defeat the white man.

Dedan Kimathi *a.k.a.* Field Marshal was the commander of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army. The song refers to his courage and charisma in leading the armed struggle against the colonialists. The mountain is Mt. Kirinyaga (which the settlers mis-named Kenya) and upon this mountain the Gikuyu people believed was a shrine for their creator, *Mwene Nyaga*. Metaphorically then, Kimathi receives the strength and courage to defeat the colonialist from God almighty.

In another song Kamaru sings,

*Gitonga kimwe gia Gikuyu
Nikiageririe guthaitira
Gikiuga ti cai ngukaga
Ni ngui ciakwa ngunyitaga. (Kamaru, Nyimbo cia Mau Mau, vol. 2)*

One wealthy Gikuyu
In his cowardice tried to save himself
He told the police that he had not come for tea
'I came to fetch my dogs'.

The 'tea' referred to in the song is a metaphor for the oath-taking ceremonies. Consider the metaphorical meaning given to a 'bean' in the following stanza,

*Great love I saw among women and children
If a bean fell to the ground
They split it among themselves. (Kinyatti, 1980: 57)*

It is therefore clear that during the liberation struggle in Kenya, the Mau Mau fighters used the song as an oral means to combat colonial cultural imperialism, as well as to unite the oppressed against the social, political and economic domination of the imperial forces. To

effectively do this, the songs therefore had to be culturally authentic and participatory in performance. A similar situation is recognisable in Zimbabwe during Zimbabwe's liberation war. According to Alec Pongweni,

The Chimurenga music of the Zimbabwean war of liberation both required and facilitated the participation of all. The songs themselves owed their authenticity and popular appeal to tradition, just as the inspiration to embark on revolutionary action owed its historicity to the forces of revolution perceiving themselves as rising to the challenge left by ancestral heroes who had gone before them. (1997: 64).

Song as Political Action

Apart from the songs being a uniting force for the masses fighting against colonialism, they had an important role as a record of the history of the Mau Mau and the fight for land and freedom. They became an invaluable accompaniment and reference to the written records of the Mau Mau war. The Mau Mau fighters made a concerted and conscious effort to document their activities at the battlefield, including the meetings that they held. In the words of Field Marshal Kimathi to the General Conference of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, "*These documents will be concrete evidence that we fought and died for this land*" (Kinyatti, 1987). These written records were preserved in an archive that was ambushed and confiscated by the British forces after a traitor led them to the hiding place in 1955. A local newspaper, the *Baraza*, reported:

Mapema mwaka huu jeshi la serikali lilishambulia maficho katika msitu wa Aberdares yaliyotumiwa na Dedan Kimathi. Kati ya vitu vingi vilivyopatikana kulikuwa na makaratasi mengi na vitabu vingi kama vinavyandikwa katika skuli vilivyokuwa vimetumiwa na Kimathi kwa kuandika matokio. (Baraza, 27 August 1955)¹²⁹

This archive had been well-preserved for as Kinyatti writes,

It was Dedan Kimathi's strong belief and wish that the political and military

¹²⁹ Early this year the government forces ambushed a secret abode in the Aberdares forest that was used by Dedan Kimathi. Among the many things that were confiscated were volumes of papers and exercise books like the ones used in schools, and which had been used by Kimathi to record events.

work of the Mau Mau movement should be documented and preserved for posterity. In this connection, Kimathi insisted that every guerrilla front commander should send a written monthly report on his unit's activities, including the minutes of all the meetings held in his camp ... In keeping with this policy Kimathi appointed field secretaries to tour all guerrilla camps and battlefields and to document the activities of the guerrilla army. (1987: xvii)

Since not all situations were conducive to recording the events, most were recorded in songs. Karari Njama confirms, "*we made a new song to record every event. We therefore could report our activities in songs*" (1966: 178). Both resounding victories and fatal defeats were recorded. Njama records this victorious song after the battle at Tumutumu,

*Listen and hear this story
Of the Tumutumu Hill!
So that you may realise that God is with us
And will never abandon us*

*It was on a Wednesday
We were in a village down the valley
The enemy decided to climb
In order to see Kikuyuland*

*When it struck two in the afternoon
Waruanja was sent down the valley
Dressed like a woman
In order to spy*

*He brought back a valuable message
That Kirimukuyu was guarded by security forces
Down in the valley there were 400 fighters
Whom the government intended to surround*

*Good fortune came our way
In the form of a girl
Named Kanjunio [who returned with Waruanja's message]
Who saved a thousand lives*

*When it struck two
A thunderous noise was heard from every direction
Bren guns were firing from every direction
But God helped us and we descended safely*

*Gakaru gave his own life
To save the lives of his friends
He lit a fire [i.e., threw a grenade]
And the machine guns ceased their firing. (1966: 346)*

Similarly Wachanga records the following song which was composed after a major defeat at Kayahwe,

Kayahwe is a very bad river.

*Kayahwe is a very bad river.
Kayahwe is a very bad river.
Where our heroes were massacred*

*Let me go mama.
I go, mama.
Let me go and see Kayahwe,
Where our heroes were massacred.*

*General Kago cannot sleep.
General Kago cannot sleep.
Our heroes cannot sleep,
When they remember Kayahwe. (Wachanga, 1975: 86)*

However, the battle was not just at the war front. Just as the fighters were vigilant in composing songs about the war front, they also agitated the people on all other fronts. The following song is clear,

*Problems have never solved themselves
Difficulties are there to be surmounted
The wise and even the foolish
Who has not got ears!
Who has not heard the anguish of our children!*

*Now that there are no schools for Africans' children
The British oppressor does not mind
And neither does the Indian merchant lose his sleep
Worrying over what will benefit our children tomorrow.*

*This is the time to struggle:
Kenyan's come forward
And build many revolutionary schools all over Kenya
We have suffered enough.*

*The days of relying solely on spears are gone
Now it is time to add the power of the pen to the spear
Because our today
Also add the power of their pens to their arms.*

*And you our parents, give us pens
So that when the enemy attacks us
We shall come forward and assist our patriots-
For the youth must be ready
To take the place of the aged.*

*Let us be ready to fight for our land
And let the children sharpen their minds
And those amongst us who have turned traitors
May the curse of the children befall them! (Kinyatti, 1980: 20)*

The songs emphasised the need for formal education. They urged the people to send children to schools, because the pen was a weapon like the spear, and it was time to 'add the power of the pen to the spear'. The people were urged to support the efforts of the indigenous schools that had been started by the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association and the Kikuyu Karing'a Educational Association. It was for this reason that education was considered central in the struggle to regain freedom and stolen land that the agitation for it went hand in hand with the armed struggle.

In order to counter the success of the Mau Mau movement against the colonial government through music, the colonialists set in motion propaganda efforts that led to the formation of *Kiama kia Muthiki* (Music Society). This group simply used the already composed songs of the Mau Mau and substituted the words to reflect anti-Mau Mau wordings (Wanjau, 1988: 190). In the same vein, Gakaara wa Wanjau when in detention was promised parole by the colonial government if he wrote anti-Mau Mau propaganda songs, plays, and concerts. In his book *Mau Mau author in Detention* he says,

Before I could be placed on parole the Chief Rehabilitation Officer decided to put me on test—to see whether or not I had repudiated the Mau Mau ideology. I became eligible to live in Block 9 on the 18th May 1956 and I was assigned my old work—writing. Only this time I must write anti-Mau Mau propaganda such as songs, plays, and concerts. There I was told: I would be tested in work of my experience! (1988: 190)

It therefore became important for the Mau Mau movement to turn its material handicap of political oppression into a spiritual advantage to counter the colonial government's superior propaganda apparatus. Their only tool was the songs which became an important medium in mass communication, and whose linguistic expression targeted the individuals' conscience and thereby arousing and deepening the entire community's consciousness. The following song invokes the holy and powerful name of the 'black peoples' God', who is at hand to help them against the colonial forces. It cautions people against endorsing the lies of colonial propaganda.

*The name of the Black people's Ngai [God]
Is true and holy and consecrated.
That is why the patriarch forbade
It's being mouthed by people lightly*

Because it is truly holy and powerful.

Chorus

*They saw what they saw with their own eyes
And saw the strength and unity of the masses
And they firmly rejected being softened with words
They acted just the way they had always sworn they would*

...

*They herded into the colonial office
To have their fingerprints taken
They firmly refused to have their fingerprints taken
They were all detained in Yatta and in Nakuru
And all this because of their own land.*

...

*Ngai saw the enemy destroy maize fields
He felt for the children suffering from hunger
And blessed them with wild fruits and wild game
And He told them: 'Eat these to your fill'.*

...

*Do not believe the enemy's deceptive words
Never, never allow your fingerprints to be taken
The justice of our cause and struggle
Is the covenant binding all African masses together. (Kinyatti, 1980: 54–5)*

Song as Orature of Combat

The Mau Mau struggle has inspired a plethora of both in fiction and non-fiction writers, who have used or misused the Mau Mau history for their own fictional or ideological ends. The blurb on Meja Mwangi's novel, *Taste of Death* aptly captures the situation, "*the impress of the Mau Mau struggle on [the] Kenyan literal imagination is a living fact and it is unlikely to fade with the passage of time*" (1975).

A good number of biographical books have been published that have radically changed the portrayal of the Mau Mau history. Earlier, only books written by anti-Mau Mau colonial sympathisers were widely available, and since the confiscated volumes of Mau Mau literature are still unavailable to the public as Kinyatti discloses, "*These texts, and*

many others dealing with Mau Mau, are 'classified materials' in our own 'national' archives; and under a joint British-Kenya agreement, they cannot be made public until 2013 A.D." (1987: xviii)

Fictional work on the Mau Mau have found expression in Kenya and beyond, going as far as Hollywood. Robert Ruark's novel *Something of Value* (1955) was reproduced into a film in 1957. Ruark belongs to a category of writers whose works Ngugi wa Thiong'o refers to as a 'cultural bomb' which he describes as the "*biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against ... collective defiance.*" (1986: 3) Ruark is one the writers who have chosen to be entirely anti-Mau Mau, bearing similarities to Carothers, the hired psychologist. His attitude to Africans as a whole is clearly noticeable from his writings:

In order to understand Mau Mau it is first necessary to understand Africa, and the portion of Africa in which Mau Mau was allowed to flourish is only just fifty years old as we reckon civilization. To understand Africa you must understand a basic impulsive savagery that is greater than anything we 'civilized' people have encountered in two centuries. (1955: 211)

And yet there are writers who have canonised the Mau Mau fighters and the struggle for land and freedom. The best examples in fiction are Ngugi wa Thiong'o's plays: *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* written in collaboration with Micere Githae Mugo, and *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, and *Maitu Njugira* both of which were written and performed with the collaboration of the Kamirithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre. Other writers of fiction like Meja Mwangi and Charles Mangua have adopted a general sympathetic position towards the fighters.

An analysis of the Mau Mau songs, discounts the opinion of those writers and historians who have dismissed the Mau Mau movement as a 'tribal organisation', or as "*Kikuyu nationalism as opposed to Kenya African nationalism*" (Ogot, 1976). In discussing 'Kikuyu hymns' Ogot claims the songs are aimed at 'Kikuyu nationalism' largely because they were composed and sung in Gikuyu. In a similar contention William Ochieng argues,

Mau Mau was definitely not a nationalist movement... [it] had no nationalist programme... the central committee that managed the Mau Mau Movement contained representatives from Murang'a, Nyeri, Embu, Meru and Machakos... It is therefore important to correctly evaluate Mau Mau as a primarily Kikuyu affair. (1976: 140-3)

There is no question that the movement was largely based in Central Kenya, and that the songs were rendered in Gikuyu. This nevertheless can only be an important step towards strengthening nationalism. The Zimbabwean writer Chenjarai Hove once opined that you cannot ‘build a town by destroying the villages’. The importance in analysis of such songs composed and used under such circumstances lies in the aims and objectives and the underlying meanings.

This study has indicated that the aims and objectives of the Mau Mau songs are beyond Gikuyu ethnicity—they are a contribution to national liberation, a response to oppressive forces interested in the destruction of individual ethnic traditions and cultures. This is in line with Kinyatti’s assertion that “*the mere fact that of the Movement being located in Central Kenya does not answer the questions of its character*”. He goes on to claim that,

It was in Central Kenya that the British colonialism created the conditions for modern nationalist movement. Wholesale land seizures, large single-crop plantations, railroad towns like Nairobi, and the railroad itself meant the formation of a class of workers whose traditional links with land and kin had been disrupted. (Kinyatti, Mau Mau: A Revolution Betrayed: 30)

Both Cabral and Fanon have argued convincingly that the imperialists and their forces aim at the systematic destruction of the colonised people’s cultural values. For this reason, the struggle against colonialism is necessarily a cultural struggle. As Fanon has wittily put it, “*culture is not put in the cold storage during the struggle*”. He further argues that the “*crystallisation of the national consciousness will both disrupt literary styles and themes*” (1965). He does not consider the cultural struggle as a different battle to be staged separately from the political struggle. They have to go hand in hand, as it is this consciousness [crystallised in the literary themes and styles that will create a new people]. This literature he calls a ‘literature of combat’.

This may be properly called a literature of combat, in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation. It is literature of combat, because it moulds the national consciousness... It is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space. (1965: 193)

The Mau Mau songs grew out of the cultural milieu of Gikuyu orature. They can therefore be considered as an expression of the ‘will

to liberty expressed in terms of time and space', and historically fall in their rightful category of 'orature of combat'.

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Resistance and Performance Dynamics: the case of busungusungu vigilantes' dance of the Sukuma of Tanzania

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Introduction

Vigilante groups, in most cases, arise not only in response to conditions of inequality or injustice but more importantly, because of changing definitions of these conditions. Those involved must recognize and define their plight as an injustice, and one that is intolerable to live with rather than just passing it off as a cruel twist of fate (Lewis, 1985). Moreover, participants in such groups must come to believe that an alleviation of these intolerable conditions is possible and their efforts will be important in obtaining the desired changes in, for example, political, economic or social conditions.

In attaining their goals, vigilante groups use different media of communication, one of which is dance and music. They use these to amplify their ideology and in contesting and negotiating their identity, that is, “*who they are, who they imagine themselves to be, or who some one thinks they are*” (Pillay, 1994: 12). Music, as “*medium for creative verbal expression...*” (Nketia, 1974: 189), is used because it is “*acoustically louder or more penetrating than speeches*” due to its polyvalent nature. Hence music is thought to knit its “*auditors together in a unified reaction that will inspire them jointly in work, battle, dance, worship, burial, initiation rites, and the like*” (Lomax, 1968: 15). On the other hand, dance and music as forms of communication provide the environment which

Avorgbedor calls ‘artistic license’, whereby a dancer or a musician is provided with “*polite ways for saying impolite things; it provides ways for expressing the inexpressible.*” Hence, dance and music (songs) remove normal and immediate moral and personalized responsibilities from the dancer or the singer, and consequently leaving them blameless (1990: 218–221). Moreover, music is believed to have the power to “*appeal to and leave lasting impressions on the minds of the listeners*” (Avorgbedor, 1990: 224), an important characteristic especially for vigilantes like the Sungusungu which use dance and song to express themselves and to implore the masses to support them.

The Sukuma and Sungusungu

Sukuma people are one of the Bantu-speaking societies occupying the south of Lake Victoria in the administrative regions of Mwanza and Shinyanga. They live in an area of 50,000 km², with a population of about five million (Tanzanian population is 34,569,232 as cited by United Republic of Tanzania, 2002, Population and Housing Census p. 6)¹³⁰. However, due to migration for fertile land for agriculture and grazing, the Sukuma now are found mostly in Mara (Bunda), Kagera (Biharamulo), Tabora (Nzega and Igunga) and Mbeya (Chunya) region. The Sukuma are basically agricultural people, but livestock and particularly cattle, constitute an important asset both economically—as a store of wealth—and socially for various rites (Brandstrom, 1985: 3).

Sungusungu emerged as the result of social and economic conflicts in Sukuma society. Available studies about the Sungusungu concur that social insecurity in most parts of the Sukuma area and the people’s mistrust of law enforcement machinery were the main reasons for its emergence. Thus, Sungusungu began quite specifically as a defense against theft—armed cattle rustlers in particular and brigands, including highway robberies (Abrahams, 1987; Campbell, 1987 and 1990; Makoye, 1993 and 2000; Masanja, 1992; Masesa, 1994; Nsunduki, 1993; Sabasaba and Rweyemamu, 1986). There is no precise word as to the formation of the Sungusungu. According to Masanja

¹³⁰ <http://www.tanzania.go.tz/censusf.html>

(1992: 204) and co-researchers Sabasaba and Rweyemamu (1986: 31), the first group of Sungusungu was formed in Kahama-ya-Nhalanga, which is near the border of Kahama and Nzenga Districts. According to Masanja, the founder of the Sungusungu is a man called Kishosha and the first group was formed some time in the late 1980s.

Sungusungu is not a single organized group with branches in different villages. Each village has its own leadership and organization. They collaborate with each other without coordination from any central establishment. The structure and organization of Sungusungu is based on collective systems. Decisions on all issues are made in a village assembly. Each village has its own leaders. At the top there is *ntemi* (chief) who is elected by a village assembly. He must be an elderly man with some knowledge of medicine and magic. There is no existing case where a woman has been elected as Sungusungu chief.

From the onset, the relationship between Sungusungu and the establishments has been a major point of divergence and convergence. That relationship was fragile due to the political situation that prevailed by the time Sungusungu began when Tanzania was under a single-party system (*Chama cha Mapinduzi*, CCM was the ruling and the sole party) and followed the African socialism ideology, *ujamaa*. Under *ujamaa*, the ruling party's emphasis and its support was drawn from grassroots mass participation. Hence, in spite of all the shortcomings, the ruling party fully supported Sungusungu especially through speeches (by the then national party leaders for example the late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere (National Chairman) and Rashid Kawawa (Party's Chief Secretary). In 1984, Kawawa described Sungusungu as a revolutionary force whose work was to guard citizens and their property. In his speech, Kawawa described Sungusungu as working under the guidance of the Party (C.C.M) and that "*Sungusungu are young CCM members who are fulfilling the party's call for mass action to maintain security.*" He further described them as a front line force in the attempt to build *ujamaa*. (Abrahams, 1987: 190).

On the other hand, there were less sympathetic officials especially from legal institutions like the police and the courts of law that did not compromise with what they considered a group of bandits who gave themselves powers to punish offenders beyond the established legal system (Sabasaba and Rweyemamu, 1986: 50–52). Consequently, the

Sungusungu found themselves in a dilemma and some ended up being prosecuted and jailed for illegal activities, especially for the manner in which they dealt with suspected criminals. It was widely alleged that Sungusungu members sometimes failed to hand over suspected criminals to the police and to the courts for trial, and instead resorted to torturing them.

The Sungusungu therefore found it necessary to exonerate itself and at the same time to negotiate and contest its social and political position at local and national level in order to gain support and acceptance. In order to fulfill that aim, they used dance and music as an outward means of expression. This is because they had no access to modern means of communication like radio, televisions and newspapers.

Dance and song as a means of communication

The use of dance and songs by vigilantes as a means of communication is a common practice (Sewel, 1979; Lewis, 1985; Alnes, 1969; Merriam, 1964). Hence, Sungusungu like most vigilante groups were obliged to capitalise on available means of communication to reach more people and popularise its cause. *“Singing songs of resistance, dancing, rediscovering old form of communication in the rural areas, the Sungusungu stamped a new sense of collective justice while establishing itself as the cultural reference point in the village community.”* (Campbell, 1987: 36)

The common and popular means of communication available was to be dance, especially through its songs. This is because dance is the most effective traditional means of communication in the Sukuma area. It is known for its ability to send messages to a large population within a short time. At the same time, in Sukuma society dance is perceived a cultural form that has the capacity to charm and to bring people together to share their pain, sentiments and resistance. This is due to the fact that the Sukuma are at ease when using the dance form to communicate. Through dance, for example, one is able to speak directly, (point blank) to a close or a very respected person within the society who is going astray. Added to this, the offenders whom Sungusungu emerged to fight against were usually personalities feared by the people. Nobody

was prepared to speak out individually for fear of retaliation from the offenders. However, through dance and music, people could speak out as a group or as a community with one voice. There was therefore no possibility of accusing individuals.

Normally the *Busungusungu* dance is performed on the day of installing a system in a village where it does not exist or when a culprit is caught and has to be prosecuted. Installing (*kutemya*) is a process or system, which is used to initiate a Sungusungu movement in a village. This system requires a village that has an existing Sungusungu system to go to another village and install or introduce it there, including the election of leaders and cleansing of wrongdoers (*batulija*). Leaders are elected through an open ballot. After the *ntemi* has been elected, he must be blessed by the initiating group's *ntemi* before he is officially installed. The *ntemi* normally takes some *lwanga* (saliva) in his mouth and sprays it on the face of the new *ntemi* while saying the following words:

Baba ntemi

Twenhaga busalama kung'wako

Shilanga shishe buta na masonga

Ga kulwila basambo

Tutabatulaga nulu kubiboneela

Bise tulikooba mholu duhu

Chief, our father

We have brought peace to your place

Our weapons are bows and arrows

To fight the wrongdoers

We don't beat or bully anybody

We are working for peace

He is then handed a bow and arrows, following which the cleansing of wrongdoers begins. The newly elected secretary (*katibu*) reads out the list of the secretly-named culprits. Normally, *busungusungu* dance is performed before the culprits are summoned to the high table (*ha meza*) to answer the accusations brought against them. The dance is done at this particular time to first of all bring to the arena the Sungusungu vigilantes who have come to install the system in the village. The head-commander dances apart from the other dancers. Both the songs and the dance movements are meant to terrify everyone in the vicinity, the wrongdoers in particular. For example, they perform movements, which imitate the action of beating someone (*batulija* in this case) with a baton. This is synchronized with heavy stamping on the ground. Each male vigilante holds a baton in his right hand while in his left, he holds a bow and sometimes a shield. On his back he carries a quiver full of

arrows. Each vigilante must have a whistle (*ndulilu*), which hangs on his chest attached to a piece of rope tied around his neck. Female vigilantes carry only batons but must also have *ndulilu*.

By this time everyone is seated in a big circle leaving a gap for the vigilantes pass through. The vigilantes enter the circle and make their own small circle. They will continue dancing until the head-commander cum dance-leader gives them a sign to stop. Apart from scaring the wrongdoers, the dance also shows off the vigilantes' strength and solidarity. (Limbe, 1993: 19).

YAHULUM' IMBESHI

Iii! Yahulum' imbeshi
Yahuluma gaikil' amawe
Basambo mgutunga he?
Gaikil' amawe
Basambo mgulala he?
Gaikil' amawe
Halaw' obyedaga
Gaikil' amawe

Iii! The eagle soars swiftly
As it glides, stones roll down
Offenders, where will you go/hide
Stones are rolling down
Offenders, where will you sleep
Stones are rolling down
Halawa is angry
Stones are rolling down

The accused are then all summoned to approach the high table (*ha meza*) one by one. The *kamanda-ntale* reads out the names and anyone who hears his name must stand up and quickly walk towards the high table. Then he is asked the following question:

Wenhwa k' aha? (What has brought you here?)

The rule is that he must narrate all his wrongdoings and after that wait quietly for a reply from the vigilantes. If they feel that he has reported everything he did, he is asked to fine himself. The fine is normally in the form of money, or a specified number of goats, or cows, depending on the crime. For instance, he may say that he will pay a fine of two cows. If the Sungusungu vigilantes remain silent, he has to go on increasing the number until they clap their hands to show that they are satisfied.¹³¹

However, if the accused refuses to cooperate during the interrogation, then he will have to be 'danced' or 'washed'. In this process, a few

¹³¹ There are other offences, like killing people during armed robberies or bewitching people, which are not punishable by a mere pay of compensations or fines. People who are found guilty of these offences are usually exorcised, that is, they are chased away from the village.

vigilantes are called to the high table to form two parallel queues, leaving a narrow passage in between. The accused is commanded to pass through that passage from any direction. Immediately the accused enters the passage, the vigilantes begin to beat him randomly with their batons. As a result of that beating, an accused will jump here and there contorting his body. It is this that is referred to as dancing, meaning dancing to the rhythm of the strokes of the batons on his body. In most cases he will be crying which is interpreted as ‘singing’. While all this is happening, he has to move forward until he reaches the end of the passage. Then he will be asked to continue with his confession. If they still feel that he is being untruthful, he will be sent to the passage to endure the ordeal of beatings again. This will go on until they are certain he has confessed all his wrongdoing.¹³²

The Sungusungu use dance and songs as a means of communication to forge social solidarity among its members. It creates legitimacy and identity by explaining who they are, who its potential members are and with whom it identifies at local and national levels. The Sungusungu dance song (Makoye, 1993), for example, carries messages that assert the need to knit social solidarity among its members. At the same time, it aims to appeal to the masses to rally behind it as indicated in the following song:

<i>Napiga hodi umu Ng'wagala</i>	I knocked at Ng'wagala
<i>Nazunilijiwa</i>	I was warmly welcomed.
<i>Ndilomba bokelag' ishilika lyane</i>	Please, I beg you to embrace my movement
<i>Lyabaly' abatuliya</i>	Which has contained the offenders
<i>Lyabamal' abasubiji n' abalogi</i>	Which has wiped out thieves and witches
<i>Malenga nimiile</i>	I Malenga, firmly I stand
<i>Nalilikandikicha nsalama</i>	Seriously performing my duty
<i>Bakanigwaga jilulumo</i>	They only hear about me
<i>Nabusul' ubusungu nabagadaguje</i>	I have picked my poison, I'll wipe them
<i>Mkwibisila he?</i>	Offenders, where will you hide?
<i>Nabusul' ubusungu namgadaguje</i>	I have picked my poison, I'll wipe you all

The opening line of the song is a self-assertion that Sungusungu has been accepted in different places, so “why not you?” It goes on by imploring people who have not yet joined the group to do so. Up to

¹³² This system of exercising punitive power outside constitutional legal process led to Masanja's conclusion that “Sungusungu movement is not merely an army directed against thieves, it is a movement against humanity.” (1992:204).

this point, the tone of the language is entreating, which is unusual in militaristic vigilante groups, as they are.

On the other hand, there is a subtle description of Sungusungu's concern and mission. This is evident in the lines "*Which has contained the offenders*" and "*Which has wiped out thieves and witches*". These two lines dissociate the movement from the "*offenders—thieves and witches*." In this manner dissociation impulses are installed in the mind of a listener, who in any circumstances would not like to be associated with 'offenders', but rather identify with Sungusungu.

The last three lines of the song tell exactly what is in store for the people who by the virtue of their actions may not be associated or identified with Sungusungu. Again, the song relies much on Sukuma song traditions of using symbols for emphasis. The general idea in the three lines is to wipe out "*them or you*" (offenders). How? By "*my poison!*" According to the Sukuma, a vicious, painful and cruel vendetta can be obtained through the use of poison, whose ultimate goal is death. Thus the song ends with the serious message, "*join us or you will face the consequences*." However, the process of identity contention is not resolved immediately upon receiving this harsh message. He or she must go through transformative identity realisation by assessing his or her position in the society by mirroring one's actions against others. The process is pure identity negotiation through experience in time and space. The use of poison here is not by chance, but is well-calculated in order to instil fear which inevitably culminates in individual self-assessment before the final decision on where they are or should belong.

The same approach can be seen in another song, which sets out a clear-cut boundary between people who belong to the Sungusungu and the 'others' who do not.

Solo: *Baba nalinansako gwa si*
Gwa kusaka nsambo na nogi
Wacha ntulija
Wacha nogi
Iging'hi jabizil' uhimila
Hiii! Hiii! Mayu

Father, I've a countrywide search
 A search for deviants and witches
 An offender dies
 A witch dies
 Nowadays owls hoot
 Hiii! Hiii! Mother

Chorus:

Ileka mbele h' ibala This is a terrible event that makes one leave the breasts uncovered.

The song tells us that the Sungusungu have the mandate to fight evils across the entire Sukuma area. In this manner the Sungusungu started a special search for all thieves and witches, who all deserve a death penalty or should be killed instantly. The situation becomes so tense that even owls seem to be singing in admiration of the Sungusungu work and prophesying the death of all thieves and witches. In Sukuma area it is believed that when an owl hoots in the night, it is a bad omen to a particular family, especially when if the bird hoots within the compound of that family.

Sungusungu, like most vigilante groups, from the beginning had to draw upon symbols or outward cultural manifestations of the people it claimed to represent (the Sukuma) in order to effectively communicate their cause. This also helped to establish local identity. There are many cultural symbols in Sungusungu that are apparently Sukuma. For instance, the titles of leaders and their qualities,¹³³ weapons, costumes and make-up, dance and music. In this article, however, the focus is on only two of these cultural symbols, dance and songs.

The importance of music in Sungusungu as a cultural symbol is evidenced in its multi-vocal characteristic that exploits the use of local language, singing styles and other Sukuma cultural symbols found in the lyrics. Language and singing styles as abstract symbols are among the most treasured cultural indices that are the pride of a people and bind them together. Therefore, it is natural that most songs of Sungusungu movement are in Sukuma language. The use of Sukuma language by Sungusungu in its songs can therefore be considered a conspicuous expression of an attempt to solicit ethnic identity rather than a regional one. In both Mwanza and Shinyanga regions, which are mainly Sukuma, other ethnic groups¹³⁴ are present and the unifying language is Kiswahili

¹³³ Each *Sungusungu* group in a village has its own leaders. At the top of leadership hierarchy is a *ntemi* (chief), assisted by *ntwale* (sub-chief). These two titles were taken from the Sukuma traditional chieftain system. This system was abolished all over Tanzania in the early 1960s. Like the chieftain system, these *Sungusungu* leaders are expected to be men, diviners and medicinal experts (*bafumu*; sing. *nfumu*), “The main reason for this is the need to prepare medicines to protect members from attack when they go after thieves. Some medicines are drunk and others are rubbed into incisions. If an *ntemi* is not himself an *nfumu*, he will need to consult one to obtain such medicines” (Abrahams 1987: 184).

¹³⁴ Other ethnic groups found in Mwanza and Shinyanga regions, although not part of the majority even in their totality when compared with the Sukuma, are Kerewe, Kara, Zinza, Rongo, and Sumbwa.

(Tanzania's official language). Hence the use of Sukuma language has indexical value at the general level in determining the ethnicity of the users and the spectrum of communication process.

Sukuma singing style is another aspect used by the movement to align itself with the people in negotiation of local identity. Generally, in Sukuma singing culture, group singing is given more prominence than solo singing. Hence, that practice dominates Sungusungu singing presentations. There are two common practices in group-singing organizations in Sukuma society which are reflected in Sungusungu singing too. First, the lead singer known as *ningi* sings the whole stanza, an act known as *kuliponeja*, literally to throw the song at the chorus. The chorus then repeats the whole stanza, known as *kubokela* (to receive the song). The second practice is for the *ningi* to sing an entire stanza, after which the chorus is cued in by singing few words of the stanza, known as *kutinila* (to cut the song). This act helps to remind the chorus, which then finishes the phrase by amplifying the *ningi*'s words, usually by singing along with him.

Sungusungu songs, like all Sukuma songs, are divided into two categories—*mbusule* and *busoloja* songs. *Busoloja* songs have many stanzas and normally contain more than one theme. Literally, *busoloja* means to narrate an event or a story in detail. A *busoloja* song, for example, can take fifteen to thirty minutes. One Sukuma lead singer put it this way “*one can walk from Bujora village to Kisesa Township and back, a distance of approximately five kilometres, while the same busoloja song is still being sung.*” However, the practice is for one verse in particular and a song in general to be repeated as many times as the lead singer wishes. *Mbusule* are short songs, normally of a single theme.

However, there are few songs in Sungusungu which are in the Kiswahili language, but they are mostly sung at national ceremonies or during the official visits of high level government or the ruling party leaders (especially those who do not belong to the Sukuma society). During “*presidential welcomes, [and] government-sponsored parades ...*” (Gunderson, 1999), songs in Kiswahili help to broaden the identity boundaries. It is an attempt to communicate clearly outside the immediate local audience because, generally speaking, Kiswahili is the

symbol that most gives Tanzanians their sentiment of being one within a multi-cultural nation. Therefore when Sungusungu use Kiswahili in some of their songs, it is a direct and simple message to the government and ruling party leadership that, “*here we are, we are Sukuma but still we are Tanzanians.*”

The Sukuma attachment to cattle is also exploited in Sungusungu songs as a cultural symbol,¹³⁵ as indicated in the following song:

<i>Bashosha ng'ombe bukagi</i>	Cattle returners rise up
<i>Tukibone nabo abasambo</i>	Let us go to meet the cattle rustlers
<i>Twanoga kwihewa na bacholela nnguzu</i>	We are of them who use force to get wealth
<i>Bakuja bunung'hiliya mmabujiku</i>	The one who move around during the nights
<i>Mshitugo sha bichabo</i>	Sniffing in other people's cattle
<i>Nakunyama bichabo mmayila</i>	And way laying people in order to steal from them
<i>Kuja ku balogi nabo</i>	And those witches
<i>Tukapambane nabo</i>	We're going to fight them too
<i>Ik' imizengo yamala banhu kulwabo</i>	For many people have died due to their activities

As observed earlier, the initial reason for the rise of Sungusungu was to fight against social insecurity; specifically cattle rustling that threatened the most treasured individual symbol of social prestige and economical assurance or insurance. Throughout Sungusungu activities, cattle form a dominant point of reference that sanctifies Sungusungu as an important institution for safeguarding the existence of the people and their culture. For this reason, Sungusungu sometimes refer to themselves as ‘cattle returners’ as a way of negotiating local identity.

However, this observation should not create the impression that all households in rural Sukuma own cattle. Nonetheless, every household is potentially able to own cattle either by buying or through marriage practices. In Sukuma society, giving and receiving bride-price in terms of cattle is still considered as a prestigious to both the bride and bridegroom's family. Thus songs about fighting cattle rustlers whose aim is to deprive the society of its cherished cultural symbol (cattle) is a social claim and a projection of the Sungusungu identity.

This song also insists focuses on witches as another concern of the Sungusungu. According to these two songs, witches, like thieves and cattle rustlers, have to be eliminated from the society. By dissociating themselves from witches, Sungusungu identifies with the community as

¹³⁵ See also similar practices amongst the Dinka of Southern Sudan in Francis Mading Deng, *The Dinka and Their Songs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

witchcraft beliefs and practices are particularly significant in the Sukuma daily social, economic and political life. It is believed that witchcraft can affect or influence nature for good or for evil. For example, a Sukuma *namugi* (head of the family) uses magic to protect himself, his wife, children, cattle and agricultural activities against the malevolent power of witchcraft¹³⁶. In Sukuma society, therefore, unnatural and natural causes at any point in their life can be associated with the influence of witchcraft. Hence, being accused as a witch in a community is very humiliating if not a dangerous indictment. As the following song shows:

Solo: Nikale bapejiwagw' abachawi
Bimbilagwa mimbo ga matatizo
Pili tukulyima uligwe

Even in the past, witches were driven away
 Songs were sung for them to hear
 Pili, we'll sing the song for you to hear

Chorus:

Nani wapemba numba yane
Ng'wan' Ibelenge
Tukantule machimu abili

Who has burned my house?
 Ng'wana Ibelenge
 Let us pierce him with two spears

Solo: Ulilila Pili walila
Olijiwa ki nchawi

Pili, you're crying
 You witch, what is it that makes you cry?

In ancient times in the Sukuma society, witches were punished by flogging and being ostracized from the community. However, there is oral evidence asserting that sometimes people suspected of committing witchcraft were condemned to death. Cases concerning witchcraft were resolved at a chief's court, arbitrated by a chief who was judge. He commanded respect and trust from all his subjects. His judgment was final and popular, hence it was respected. However, after Tanzania attained independence, new processes evolved concerning witchcraft. First, chieftainship was abolished in the entire country. This resulted in the automatic abolishment of all witchcraft cases in Sukuma. From then on, all cases dealing with witches and witchcraft were to be executed solely by the High Court. These new laws did not recognize the existence of witchcraft, which meant that the High Court could not prosecute any person suspected of being a witch. Hence, all witchcraft suspects were always set free. This caused mistrust among the Sukuma toward the High Court. They believed that the court was incapable or

¹³⁶ See also similar practices among the Zande in E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937).

was deliberately not performing its duties when it came to witchcraft-related cases. The people therefore decided to take the law in their hands to punish—normally by killing—all those suspected of witchcraft.

According to Mesaki (1993: 189), 3333 witch-related incidents were reported to the police department in 13 regions of Tanzania. These cases involved the death of 3692 persons. Of these, Sukuma area accounted for 2120 cases and 2246 deaths. Additional figures available for the two mainly Sukuma regions, Mwanza and Shinyanga show that between 1984 and 1988 another 827 people lost their lives through such homicides. Thus between 1970 and 1988, 3073 people were killed in Sukuma area alone on suspicion of being witches. Nonetheless, statistics do not tell the whole story as they only give the officially reported cases and do not take into account many other unreported incidents or killings recorded as “normal homicides”. With these shocking figures one would expect Sungusungu intervention to save more lives. Instead, Sungusungu acted as accomplices to the criminal activities, as testified to in the above song testifies.¹³⁷

The crucial factor is that in a society like Sukuma where belief in witchcraft is still strong and suspected witches considered as public enemies, the act of the Sungusungu to openly declare in its songs its intention to fight witches is the process of negotiating and forging local identity. In condemning witches and declaring a desire to ‘kill’ them, Sungusungu reveals its social and political ties to the local people. On the other hand, the anti-witchcraft campaign caused Sungusungu to drift away from the government establishments (police and court of laws) that do not believe in witchcraft practices.

Sungusungu expects the government to fully support its activities because it strongly believes in its law-enforcing role, which is the main preoccupation of governmental legal institutions. However, the major differences pushing Sungusungu and legal institutions apart are their belief and conceptualization of crimes, criminals, and means of dealing with them as the following song shows:

Abasambo nulu mshidake
Nulu mj' ukwibanza

You offenders
Even if you go to court

¹³⁷ There are a several unconfirmed rumours of Sungusungu involvement in hunting out suspected witches, some of whom have apparently died while in the hands of its members.

Nulu mje wilayani
Iliko isaini ya basalama
Izuniligije tumdogadule

Even if you go to the district headquarters
You'll find there the signature of *basalama*
Which legalizes us to punish you

Hangi gandy' ukushidaka
Serikali yayugagunija
Amasambo gatogilwe chene
Mkushila duhu

Look, they [offenders] have started going to court
And the government is defending them
The offenders are very happy with that move
All in all, you will be wiped out

The song has two unparalleled ideas: identification and dissociation with government legal machinery. First, Sungusungu categorically tells offenders that they should not waste their time by going to the courts of law to complain about Sungusungu action against them. Nor should they go to the district headquarters because no one is going to listen to them since both the court of law and the district headquarters have permitted Sungusungu to operate, "*You'll find there the signature of basalama, Which legalizes us to punish you.*" This is a blatant attempt by the Sungusungu to align itself with the government machinery. It also threatens "offenders" to desist from seeking redress if they are not satisfied with the general practices of Sungusungu.

The second idea, however, presents a clear dissociation of Sungusungu from the government machinery. Through songs, the Sungusungu accuses the government machinery of defending offenders and states the offenders delight at that unprecedented action. Despite the position of the government organs, Sungusungu still considers itself as performing its duty which according to the ruling party guidelines (1971 and 1981; section 65, 96) gives it the mandate to defend its people as the following song shows.

Mimi mwana sungusungu imara
Wa hapa Kasamwa
Nimeliunga mkono
Na sisi hapa Sungusungu
Tumewahi kutishwa kwamba
Hebu jaribuni leo
Pinde zenu ziwake moto
Tulisikitika kabisa

I, strong member of Sungusungu
From here Kasamwa
I have agreed
We Sungusungu of this area
We were once threatened
That we should try
Our arrows will catch fire
We were very much aggrieved

Jeshi letu la sungusungu
Siyo la upiganaji
Tunatekeleza tamko
La mwongozo wa chama
Mwaka sabini na moja

Our Sungusungu army
Is not a combat army
But we're fulfilling the call
From the party's guidelines
Of the year nineteen seventy one

Na themanini na moja
Ibara ya sitini na tano
Na tisini na sita
Ulinzi kwetu

And nineteen eighty one
Section sixty-five
And ninety-six
For our security

The song indicates efforts by the Sungusungu to justify its actions by quoting some sections of the ruling party's guidelines. It thus attempts to negotiate and establish ties with the party in order to gain political support. It is doing so by creating an impression that it is only out to defend its members who were "*once threatened*." By supporting and executing the party's guidelines, Sungusungu identifies with the party, and with its leadership who accept them. Consequently some of them declared it as a "*revolutionary force within the villages which ought to encouraged, rather than harassed, by bureaucracy*." (Abrahams 1987: 189). That accommodation and understanding from the party leadership affected Sungusungu conception towards the party and its leadership. It started to see the party as its co-actor:

Bashilikale buchagi masonga
Tukasalang'hanye abasambo
C. C. M kubutongi
Basalama ikalagi tayari
Kugahangi' amasonga
Viongozi wetu jama tutongeelagi
Hongera chama chetu C. C. M
Umelinda umoja na amani Tanzania
Viongozi wetu imara Tanzania
Duniani wanasifika Tanzania
Uongozi wao imara Tanzania

Soldiers, carry your arrows
Let us defeat the offenders
C. C. M will leads us
Basalama be ready
To obstruct the enemy's arrows
Our leaders please lead us
Congratulations to our party C. C. M
You've maintained peace and unity in Tanzania
Our leadership in Tanzania is strong
They are respected all over the world
Their leadership is strong

The most vivid idea from the above song is an attempt from Sungusungu to contest and at the same time, negotiate its identity at national level through the ruling party (C.C.M.) and its leadership. That is a straightforward and logical alignment because of the party leadership's support of Sungusungu after a period of misunderstanding.

In the song, Sungusungu declares that it is carrying out what the party and its leadership would like it to execute; "*C.C.M will lead us*". On one level this declaration can be seen as a total betrayal or diversion from its original purpose and its characteristic as a grass-root movement. At another level, however, it can arguably be said that it is an attempt from

Sungusungu to seek support and legitimacy from the ruling party and the government (the executive) in particular, especially in a country where one can hardly separate the ruling party and the executive.

Conclusion

Apart from other functions, dance and music (songs) as outward cultural symbols of identity played an important role as a strong means of communication for Sungusungu both at local and national level. Sungusungu took advantage of the existing dance and music culture in Sukuma society to communicate and explain itself by emphasizing on the community's cultural symbols in order to assert its identity and allegiance to its immediate audience (the Sukuma). Dance and music as multi-pronged instruments are able to present other overt forms and cultural symbols which people rely on to claim and mark their identity. By its act of using dance and music, therefore, the Sungusungu craftily managed to volubly communicate its cause both at local and national level. Judging from a corpus of Sungusungu songs (Masesa, 1994; Makoye, 1993; Nsunduki, 1993), it is clear that the movement deliberately opted to ally itself with the ruling party. This was probably a logical alternative considering the political set-up existing in the country. Judging from the statements emanating from the ruling party and government leadership to support the Sungusungu, it is obvious that the latter succeeded in using folk media as a means of communication. Such statements have been made by Kawawa, Nyerere, Sokoine, Mrema and Mwinyi.

Music and Politics in Tanzania: a case study of Nyota-wa-Cigogo

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Introduction

Music, like all art, “*is not created in a vacuum; it is the work not simply of a particular individual, but of that individual fixed in time and space and answering to a community of which he is an important part*” (Iyasere, 1974). As a social being, an artist creates a work of art from material drawn from society. Consequently, society and art enter into a relationship that makes them interconnected and inseparable. Whether the relationship is of “mutual externality or indifference, they either seek each other out or avoid one another, meet or separate, but can never completely turn their backs on each other” (Vasquez, 1973: 112).

This paper examines the relationship between music and politics in Tanzania. It presents the argument that changes in politics have always had a significant impact on music, which has maintained or changed its form and structure in accordance with the new emerging relationship. The paper begins by discussing forms of music that are prevalent in Tanzania. It then goes on to underscore some major political landmarks and their impact on music from independence to the present. The paper uses *Nyota-wa-cigogo*—a music troupe from Dodoma, to illustrate the relationship between music and politics in Tanzania. It concludes by pointing out major changes in music that have occurred as a result of its relationship with politics in Tanzania.

Music forms in Tanzania

The most prevalent musical expressions in Tanzania are *Kwaya*, *Ngonjera*, *Taarab*, *Ngoma* (dance), and Band (Jazz Music). Hip-hop music, referred to as '*Bongo flava*' is gaining popularity particularly among the young generation. Out of these, *ngoma* considered to be the only indigenous form of musical expression currently prevailing. Other forms such as *Kwaya*, *Taarab*, *Bongo Flava*, and Band music have emerged because of cultural interaction between Tanzanians and other peoples of the world.

Kwaya

Kwaya (Choir) as we understand it today arose from school and church choirs established during the colonial period in Tanzania. After independence, school choirs continued performing during some national celebrations. There was also a tendency to form choirs under the patronage of the then ruling party, the Tanganyika African National union (TANU). These TANU youth choirs performed on different occasions along with the school choirs.

Church tunes from the church choirs were taken and given secular texts for public events. Later on, traditional tunes were also incorporated in choral music. The choirs soon became a permanent feature in public gathering and celebrations. Apart from attracting people to such occasions, these choirs became an important means of mass education and political mobilisation. During the 1970s and 1980s, the government parastatals and institutions realized the importance of these choirs and therefore established *kwaya* groups of their own. Choirs were thus established in armed forces, prisons, police, parastatal organisations like the National Bank of Commerce (NBC), Bank of Tanzania (BOT), National Insurance Company (NIC); and government-owned companies like Urafiki Textile, Tanga Cement, and Tanganyika Packers.

Taarab

Taarab is a concert type of musical performance with a stage for the performers and seats for the audience. Formerly, the audience were only allowed to listen to the music and lyrics, applaud, and award the performers when a need arisen. Today, however, the audience dances to the *Taarab* music.

Taarab was first brought to Zanzibar by Arabs who settled there from Oman in 1832. During that time, *Taarab* was purely Arabic in music, text and musical instruments.

As time went by, indigenous Zanzibar *Taarab* composers began to write lyrics in Kiswahili using the Egyptian and Indian melodies copied from the records. The lyrics were along the lines of Swahili poetry.

Around 1930, *Taarab* was introduced in mainland Tanzania (then Tanganyika) and spread like bushfire to all towns along the East African coast. From the coast, *Taarab* spread to the interior following the central railway line to towns such as Dodoma, Tabora, Mwanza and Kigoma – once the main traditional route of slave trade caravans in Tanzania.

With its spread from Zanzibar, *Taarab* has also incorporated some elements of traditional indigenous music. A distinct change is that it is no longer confined to traditional romantic themes and has ventured into political, economic and social themes. The following *Taarab* lyrics, with a political theme, illustrates this observation.

NAMSHUKURU MWENYEZI

Namshukuru mwenyezi jalali mola jalia
Kutuletea mlezi alo mwema Tanzania
Ni chama cha mapinduzi Mungu atakijalia

Ooh Mapinduzi
Ni chama cha Mapinduzi
C.C.M yajenga nchi.

Mungu akiye baraka kwa hadhi na maangozi
Tutake kila fanaka za kilimo na za kazi
Tuziondoshe tabaka raia na viongozi

Mapinduzi ya usawa, uondoke ubazazi
Ujengeke ujamaa, kwenye zote hizi ngazi
Tuzione masalia, ya wapinga mapinduzi

I thank the Almighty

I thank God the Almighty
For bringing us a good patron
It is C.C.M
God should bless it abundantly.

Ooh Mapinduzi!
C.C.M. is building the country!

Let God bless it for its honour and leadership ability
Let us all wish it all the best.

Let it abolish all segregations among the people
And provide equal opportunities without discrimination
Socialism should be implemented in all levels
So that those sceptics are crushed.

Today *Taarab* is a popular music form and it represents an invaluable heritage of oral literature in Tanzania and neighbouring countries.

Jazz-band

Jazz-band developed particularly after the Second World War. This was when Africans recruited into European armies came back from the war where they had learned how to play the guitar and got access to general musical activities during leisure time. A typical Jazz-band group consists of two or three guitars, two or four singers, and idiophone section consisting of Marakash, clappers, drums and other percussion instruments. There is also an aerophone section with saxophones and trumpets. Nowadays, keyboards are widely used where the piano and organ feature the most.

Despite influences from Kenya and Zaire (particularly Dholuo music and Lingala respectively), Tanzania built a strong national music with lyrics in Swahili and rhythms drawing heavily from traditional music. One of the first great music modernizers, Salimu Abdallah, formed a band called Cuban Marimba in the late 1950s, developing a sound that shared the multiple-guitar parts of Zairean music with rhythms from the indigenous Morogoro people. Another band with a similar trend is Morogoro Jazz band that developed the local Likembe rhythm. This move was also adopted by Dar Jazz, Western Jazz and Atomic Jazz among many others.

Dance

Dance or Ngoma¹³⁸ is the most popular of all music forms in Tanzania. It includes songs, narratives, mime and skits. Some dances use role-playing and dramatisation, and are classified as dance-dramas. Dance, like all forms of art, has meaning. The meaning of a particular dance is embedded either in the body movements, music, songs, skits, narrative, or in the fusion of some or all of these elements. Dances and their meanings, however, differ according to the type of dance and the ethnic group in which the dance is performed.

Different dances have different patterns. Dances with simple repetitive patterns often rely heavily on vocal and instrumental musical accompaniment that may also carry the message and meaning of the dance. The roles of song and instrumental music are secondary to movements in most narrative dances, which normally have complicated movement patterns and rhythmic structures. Quite often the songs are made up of short phrases or nonsensical syllables such as ooh oye ye ye, eeeh eeeh eeh or yo yo wee eeeh. Instrumental music features in such dances, but there are also some dances, for example, the *Ambrokoi* dance of the Wamaasai or *Ligihu* of the Wangoni where no music instruments are used at all. In these dances there is only stamping of the feet, jumping, and singing.

Ngoma links rural and urban societies in Tanzania. Apart from its dominance among all music forms in rural Tanzania, it is also performed by many schools and urban-based music troupes. Dances are also performed by the University of Dar-es-Salaam and at the Bagamoyo College of Arts. These institutions also offer courses in dance. Additionally, they carry out practical experiments on how to incorporate dance into drama.

Most of the dances performed in urban areas have their counterparts in the rural areas. The significant difference between urban and rural dances is that most of the urban dances are static, obsolete and incapable of further development, even though they may achieve a certain degree

¹³⁸ Ngoma is a Swahili term that has been derived from Bantu languages spoken by Bantu people who form the largest ethnic grouping in Tanzania. As a term, Ngoma can either mean 'a drum', 'a dance' or 'an event' where dance and drumming takes place (Kaduma, 1972).

of imagery. Most are performed out of their original context and thus lack meaning. They can be compared to abstract verse, where “*words are put together to make beautiful pictures and patterns of imagery, but the arrangement of the words carries no special conversational meaning behind it.*”¹³⁹ As a result, some urban groups have begun to choreograph some of their dances to create meaning that is relevant to urban audiences (Makoye, 1996).

Ngonjera

Ngonjera are poems arranged in the form of dialogue where opposing parts engage in a debate. The performance is based on recital of the poems. Two individuals or groups may debate with each other on the subject of various aspects of Party and government policy. ‘The politically ‘correct’ disputant is much wiser than the ‘fool’ who challenges him, and by the end of the poem, the fool is converted to ‘proper political thinking.’¹⁴⁰ The recitation is accompanied by hand gestures, facial expressions and some dramatic movements to emphasise or elaborate a point. The performers often dress in costumes representing characters in the poems.

Historical Overview of Music and Politics in Tanzania

The early days of independence

Politics began to influence music immediately after independence, when in 1962, the then President Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere established the ministry of culture. In his inaugural speech, he said:

The major change that I have made is to set up an entirely new Ministry: the Ministry of National Culture and Youth. I have done this because I believe that culture is the essence and spirit of any nation ... Of all crimes of colonialism

¹³⁹ Ali, A. Mazrui, ‘Meaning Versus Imagery in African Poetry’, *Presence Africaine*, 65/1 (1968), 49–57 (p. 49).

¹⁴⁰ Jane Plastow, 1991, p. 239.

there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe we had no indigenous culture of our own, or that what we had was worthless—something of which we should be ashamed, instead of a source of pride... When we were at school, we were taught to sing the songs of the Europeans. How many were taught the songs of the Wanyamwezi or the Wahehe? ... Lots of us can play the guitar, the piano, or other European instruments. How many Africans in Tanganyika, particularly among the educated, can play the African drums? (Nyerere, 1967: 186)

In response to Mwalimu Nyerere's move, ideologically motivated music groups were established to praise the political leadership and state policies, to celebrate the achievements of the nation as a whole, and help mobilise opinion for socio-political innovations. As a result, a new blend of music known as populist music emerged. The term populist music is used deliberately to mean a music movement established "*by most African ruling parties to seek ways of mobilising cultural techniques to reinforce national consensus*" (Kerr, 1995: 196). It is the co-opting of music into the political system in order to serve those in power, that is, the dominant class. From the point of view of the dominant class, populist music discusses and interrogates society. It comments on, critiques and intervenes in various issues. Under the patronage and sponsorship of the state, populist music propagates the ideology of the state apart from praising and confirming those in power.

The Tanzanian state established a National Dance Troupe (NDT) in 1963, a year after the Ministry of Culture was founded. The NDT was formed with the objective of creating a positive image of a new nation for foreigners and tourists, and at the same time acting as a symbol of pride and unity to Tanzanians. Nevertheless, the notion of the National Dance Troupe as a model was hampered by the fact that it was detached from the realities of rural life in Tanzania. The group, instead of using veteran performers, trained professional dancers who then chose some indigenous regional dances and modified them "*to create a sanitised, politically acceptable national repertoire*."¹⁴¹ Notwithstanding, the National Dance Troupe inspired the establishment of many music troupes, which today form the urban-commercial music movement.

¹⁴¹ David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre* (London: James Curry, 1995) 1995, p. 205.

The Arusha Declaration

The Arusha Declaration was a blueprint consisting of a set of declarations transforming Tanzania into a socialist state. The Arusha Declaration was followed by a number of significant changes in the socio-political and economic systems as Tanzanians battled to transform the *Ujamaa* idealism into reality.¹⁴² This époque was also filled with high hopes for human equality and the eradication of poverty, illiteracy and disease. These aspirations were similar to people of all lifestyles in Tanzania, and were manifested in social, political and economic activities, including the arts. However, it was not until 1967 that significant development in Tanzanian ‘political’ music began to take place. During and after the launching of the Arusha Declaration in 1967, the arts were recognised as important ideological tools for the propagation of the Arusha Declaration. The then President, the late Mwalimu Nyerere took personal initiative to urge artists and the Tanzanian population to promote the arts for propagating the Arusha Declaration (Siri Lange, 1995). *Kwaya* and *Ngonjera* were popularised specifically for that purpose.

The promotion and popularisation of *Ngonjera* (poetic drama) was initiated in the late 1960s by a renowned and influential poet, Mathias Mnyampala. Mnyampala arranged his poems in the form of dialogue where opposing parts engage in a debate. During and after the Arusha Declaration, *Ngonjera* was popularised throughout Tanzania, particularly in primary and secondary schools.

Music scholars in Tanzania acknowledge the ideological intention behind the development of music during the *Ujamaa* period, which was to propagate the official policy and echo official statements. “[O]ften dance songs will come up within a week of a pronouncement of a new policy, repeating the content as given by the government or Party and uncritically supporting it and calling upon everybody to do the same” (Mlama, 1991: 103). Music became a necessary component in the never-ending official functions from village to national level. However, the prevailing socio-political and economic realities encouraged the

¹⁴² The word *Ujamaa* is ‘a Swahili one with Arab roots which appears to form part of a set of related words involving various connotations of collectivity, assembly, family and associations’. See Abrahams, R.G, ed., *Villagers, Villages and the State in Modern Tanzania* (Cambridge: Centre for African Studies, 1985), p. 8.

development of music not only to serve as a mouthpiece for leaders' speeches, but also to genuinely support the state in its initiatives. The Tanzanian people had great hope in the Arusha Declaration and *Ujamaa* policies, regarded as policies that would lead Tanzania to economic prosperity. The Arusha Declaration, for example, emphasised rural development and the eradication of poverty, ignorance and disease for all Tanzanians (Nyerere, 1968). It also introduced a leadership code that compelled leaders to desist from capitalist practices. These moves were positively received by the majority of people who in return, offered genuine support to the state through music.

Party supremacy and its control over the arts

TANU and ASP (Afro Shiraz Party of Zanzibar) attained their political zenith as state parties in 1977, when they merged to form CCM (Chama Cha Mapinduzi). The merging of TANU and ASP enhanced the political monopoly of the Party which, according to Shivji (1991), brought under its control all the mass organisations, trade unions, co-operatives, students, women and youth organisations, and even football and cultural troupes. CCM was given "*the last word on the social and political truth*" (Shivji, 1991: 85). Political activities outside the ruling party were forbidden and those holding different views were suppressed. The suppression of diverging political opinion differed from those, for example, in Malawi and Kenya where opposing views were severely punished, amounting to detention and death.¹⁴³ Tanzania used more disguised forms which included "*attracting a series of disparaging epithets such as 'arm-chair critics', 'disgruntled few', 'detractors', 'unpatriotic elements', 'dissidents'...*" (Shivji, 1991: 86).

Within CCM, a closed society developed where a handful of individuals conducted public affairs behind closed doors or *in camera*. Such were the meetings of the decision-making bodies—the National Executive and Central Committees of CCM. Shivji (1991) explains that besides holding the proceedings *in camera*, their records were inaccessible. The members' the right of expression was restricted—by monopoly of the press and severe laws on publication—while the

¹⁴³ See Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Writers in Politics* (1981 and Matigari (1987).

right to know was almost non-existent. The public became victims of a rumour-mongering industry and recipients of decisions they had neither participated in making nor had powers to change or challenge.

A hidden form of political intimidation also evolved. This was a situation in which everyone was expected to agree or come to a consensus without necessarily having self-conviction. Arguments and criticism were allowed as long as they did not usher in conflict or threaten the status quo. Shivji refers to this as “*the most subtle yet profound [prejudice] to democracy*” (1991: 86).

Naturally, a majority of the people began practising self-censorship out of fear of what might happen to them. This attitude permeated all walks of life in Tanzania. Music was also affected in that there were conscious efforts by the Tanzanian state to control it. The methods which the Tanzanian state used to impose their control over the performing arts varied in comparison with other African countries, as Jane Plastow observes:

*The methods governments have used to control [music] have varied. Censorship has ranged from rigid state control in Ethiopia to the threat of censorship or creation of an atmosphere which has imposed self-censorship on writers and performers in Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Governments have also at various times poured money and support into the activities of those they approved of whilst choking off dissenters by denying them facilities, publicity and funds, or more simply, by ignoring them.*¹⁴⁴

In rural areas rigid control over the arts was carried out by Party committees which were given a mandate to inspect all performances and music groups and ensure that what was diffused toed the Party line. Lack of guidance gave these committees the right to reject anything they did not like or which would not be approved by the Party leaders. Lihamba, writing in early 1980, comments: “*there are no specific aesthetic or political guidelines which the committees follow but they depend on their own experience and the general political expectation of the censors of what might please the politicians attending. What is permissible on one occasion, therefore, can be totally banned on another.*”¹⁴⁵

As a result of strict control over the arts there emerged a deliberate

¹⁴⁴ Jane Plastow, “The Development of Music in relation to the States of Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, (Doctoral Thesis, University of Manchester, 1991), p. 325.

¹⁴⁵ Lihamba, 1985, p. 483.

move to praise whatever the Party said or did without analysis of the statements issued or the leadership itself. As a result “*a culture of parrotry*” emerged.¹⁴⁶ Shivji defines the culture of parrotry as “*the agility to chorus into the dominant song, even if it is exactly opposite to the one sung on just the previous day*” (1991: 86). There is a need here to differentiate between the culture of parrotry during the *Ujamaa* period and the one that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s. There was genuine reason for artists to support and praise the leadership during the *Ujamaa* period. The praise singing concurred with efforts by the leadership to serve the people. In other words, the arts reflected the realities of the time when different institutions in the country were mobilised to support the state’s initiatives towards socialist construction. Nevertheless, the analysis of the performing arts during the 1980s and 1990s clearly shows that the praise singing did not reflect or represent the reality of the time. Communities were aware that the leadership was corrupt, and that some of their problems were due to government inefficiency and irresponsibility, but local performing groups did not address these problems or bring them to the attention of visiting government or Party officials. Instead, they showered leaders with praise songs and poems. These praise songs again differed from those which were prevalent during the *Ujamaa* period. The tendency was now to praise the leaders and the Party for anything, even if the addressed leader or the Party had nothing to do with the circumstances of the praises. For example, the following song was performed during an occasion to celebrate the United Nations Year of the Children.¹⁴⁷ The lines about CCM and Nyerere not only overshadow the intended goal of the song, but also make the song incoherent and meaningless:

CCM chama cha mapinduzi
Hongera kwa Nyerere na wajumbe wote
Mwaka huu ni mwaka wa watoto.

CCM the party of the revolution
 Praise be to Nyerere and all the delegates
 This is the year of the children.

¹⁴⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Matigari* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1987), p. 101.

¹⁴⁷ The source of this song is Adolphina Ngonyani. The song was sung by Mateka Chihoda dance group in Mbinga district in 1979 to mark the International Year of the Child announced by the United Nations.

Thus, the compositions were such that it did not matter whether they were meaningful or not, provided they had phrases or words of praise to the Party or leadership.

Democratisation process (multiparty political system)

Conceptualisation of democratisation in Tanzania is understood as the right for the people to participate in the governing process and the openness of the institutions involved. It involves the development of various organisations that can act as political players in the democratic process. The democratisation process, that became significant from 1989, was perceived as the only way to end CCM's monopolisation of politics and its bureaucratic nature. Under this system, only a few individuals, even within the party itself, were assigned lucrative positions of leadership. The democratisation process was seen as a desperate attempt to seek political solutions for economic problems. The agreement with the IMF marked Tanzanian's acceptance of liberal economic logic. The latter seriously challenged old national policies like party supremacy and political monopoly by a single party. Economic liberalisation and political monopoly by one party were a contradiction in terms. Political rethinking was the only viable option for the Tanzanian state to preserve national unity and enable the ruling party to salvage its declining image in the public eye (Honero, 1992).

The diversion of the Party from democratic process and its transformation from a political to a state party diminished freedom of expression in Tanzania thus necessitating a new political system. "*Shifts and turns from Ujamaa and the assertion of the Government as the major policy determinant over the party*" (Mmuya and Chaligha, 1992: 20), as well as lack of leaders' credibility and trust among the people were further tools in the demand for a political change.

For a while, the Tanzanian state resisted changing its political system but eventually accepted the inevitability of competitive plural politics. The president at the time, His Excellency Ali Hassan Mwinyi was compelled to appoint a Presidential Commission in March 1991 to seek the opinions of the people as to whether they were in favour of a one-party or multiparty political system. The commission toured

the country and collected views and opinions on the political system the people favoured. It completed its task by recommending a change to a political system that favoured competitive and plural politics—a multiparty political system. The CCM government accepted the recommendation of the commission and “*opted to try to manage change and mould it to suit its own interest*” (Mmuya and Chaligha, 1992: 9). Subsequent meetings of the Party organs between January and April 1992 ratified the move and adopted a multiparty political system. From July 1992 the opposition parties were allowed to register as political parties with full legal status. This completed the legislative process to make Tanzania a multiparty state and doors to competitive politics were opened.

The period from 1992 has been characterised by a number of developments in an attempt to transform the democratisation process into a reality. These developments include: the formation of opposition political parties; constitutional changes within CCM that stripped it of its monopoly over political affairs of the country; changes in the relationship between the government and the Party whereby the Party is no longer the supreme organ of the state; restructuring of local government to make distinctions between the activities of the party and the government,¹⁴⁸ and holding multiparty general elections in 1995 and 2000. Alongside the above developments, there has been growing animosity and rivalry among and within different political parties, a deterioration of the political culture of tolerance, and reluctance of the government to relinquish laws and clauses that are oppressive.

Case Study: Nyota-wa-Cigogo

Nyota-wa-Cigogo literally means ‘the star of Gogoland’. It is a traditional music troupe from Majeleko village in Dodoma Rural District in Dodoma. Majeleko village is one of the many villages in Dodoma Rural, which are inhabited by the Wagogo ethnic group. The name ‘Wagogo’ is believed to have been given to them by the Wanyamwezi people from Tabora region. Rigby writes:

¹⁴⁸ Reference is made to the 1994 local government elections reported in detail in *The African Review* 21 (1/2).

[Wa]gogo have a legend that the [Wa]nyamwezi caravans on their journeys to the coast had a stopping-place at Cigwe in west central Ugogo. A number of large logs (matindi) were lying about near the camp; so the Nyamwezi called the local people "Gogo" because a "log" in Swahili is gogo (pl. magogo).¹⁴⁹

Nyota-wa-Cigogo represents those populist cultural troupes in rural Tanzania that were specifically established for political propaganda and mass mobilisation. Although these groups perform indigenous forms of art, their existence depends largely on their relationship with the political leadership that provides patronage and platforms for performances.

According to Musa Omari (village chairperson of Majeleko), *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* was established in 1972 concurrently with the establishment of Majeleko *Ujamaa* village. The aim was to provide Majeleko, which was a newly established *Ujamaa* village, with an artistic group that would act as a propaganda tool for celebrations and entertain state leaders during Party and government functions. The establishment of *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* was catalysed by the wave of cultural revivals that swept across Tanzania, where indigenous theatre forms were encouraged to contribute to nation-building by participating in mass mobilisation campaigns and political propaganda (Siri Lange, 1995). Musa Omari comments:

Those villages that had indigenous performance groups were encouraged to use them for nationalist campaigns and those that had none were encouraged to establish them. We in Majeleko had no indigenous cultural troupe at the time so we established Nyota-wa- Cigogo.¹⁵⁰

At the beginning, *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* only performed the *Nnindo* dance. However, in the course of time *Msunyunho*, *Mheme* and musical ensembles were added. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* enjoyed the privileged position of being the only populist music troupe in Majeleko. The group featured in most cultural events organised by the Party and government, as well as in local festivals and ceremonies.

Before the introduction of the multiparty political system in 1992, *Nyota-wa-Cigogo's* activities were limited to Majeleko and surrounding

¹⁴⁹ Peter Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship among the Gogo* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969), p. 20.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Musa Omari, 1996.

areas. However, after 1992, the activities of *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* were spread to other parts of *Ugogo* and beyond. This happened when the Party and government leaders in Dodoma municipality begun to invite *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* to perform at regional events and celebrations, as it was among the groups that declared their continuing support for the CCM party. Indeed, *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* represents a new brand of populist music groups, which capitalised on the uncertainty that loomed during the transitional period to multipartyism. Some troupes had stopped performing for the Party and the State, adopting a 'wait and see' strategy. As they waited, some troupes—especially those which had not had many opportunities to perform in public places during the monoparty political system—rushed in to offer their support to the state. The Party and Government welcomed these groups and featured them during ideological and political propaganda campaigns, regardless of the fact that most of these groups were of comparatively low artistic quality. *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* was one of these troupes.

Since the early 1990s, *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* had been invited to perform during Party and government festivals and celebrations in Dodoma town, as well as to entertain national leaders and guests who visited the region. Therefore, *Nyota-wa-Cigogo*, triumphed over its long-standing rival *Nyati wa Cigogo* which, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, was the troupe most favoured by the Party and government in Dodoma and nationally. However, *Nyati wa Cigogo* lost its place due to its ambivalent behaviour especially when it started being critical of the manner in which artistes were treated by the state.

Nyota-wa-Cigogo was able to openly harangue the opposition using language that was uncharacteristic of the populist musical troupes of the time before the introduction of the multiparty political system. *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* and other similar groups fulfilled the needs of the contemporary political trend in Tanzania, where political rhetoric is characterised by demeaning remarks and mud-slinging towards other parties and their members. The following song illustrates this:

CCM ni Kiwembe wapinzani kimewanyoa
CCM ni Kiwembe wapinzani wamekiona
Chibulunje na Mkapa ni nambari wani
Wagombea imara tumewapa kura zote
Mrema ameipata kiwembe kimewanyoa.

CCM is a razor that has shaven the opposition
CCM is a razor, the opposition has been hammered
Chibulunje and Mkapa are winners
The heroes who have got all our votes.
Mrema has been defeated. The razor has shaved them.

In the above song, Chibulunje and Mkapa are names of the Member for Chilonwa Constituency (of which Majeleko village is a part) and the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, respectively. The song praises Mkapa and Chibulunje for winning the 1995 elections. The song also ridicules Mrema—the then chairman of NCCR-Mageuzi—who during the 1995 elections contested for the Presidency and lost.

The most significant stage in the development of *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* came in 1995 when five new cultural groups were established in Majeleko village. These groups were specifically established to campaign for the 1995 Presidential and Parliamentary elections. These were *Muungano* (union) *Simba* (lion), *Gombeka* (the accuser), *Mbuni* (ostrich) and *Ukombozi* (liberation). The establishment of these groups ended the monopoly of the *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* cultural troupe in presiding over festivals and other social and political events in the village.

These groups were established from February 1995 when *Gombeka* dance group was formed by the Wanguu youth to campaign for the CCM party. The group was immediately placed under the personal patronage of the village chairman, Mr. Musa Omary, who was impressed by the group's rigorous approach in attacking the opposition. The group used most of its dance-songs and *Ngonjera* to harangue and discredit the opposition.

Gombeka performs *Ngonjera* in a very dramatic and entertaining way. The performers give comic roles to all the characters that represent the opposition. The following *Ngonjera* by *Gombeka* praises the CCM party for the victory it won in the 1995 general elections. It also attacks and ridicules the opposition leaders, particularly Mrema. The *Ngonjera* is as follows:

(The first performer moves forward, claps her hands and says)

Sisi wana Wa Gombeka toka hapa hapa Majeleko tunawaletea Ngonjera.

We are members of Gombeka groups from here, Majeleko. We are presenting to you

Ngonjera

*Hivi leo twafurahia kwa ushindi wa CCM
Kwani kimeweza kushinda kwa kura nyingi fahamu
Watoto twarukaruka wakubwa tabasamu
Tunayofuraha kubwa kwa ushindi wa CCM*

Today we celebrate the victory of CCM
It has won by a large majority
We children are dancing, the adults are smiling
We should all be happy for the victory of CCM.

*Na upinzani ulikuwa hakika mkali sana
Viongozi twawapongeza wa chama serikali pia
Hakika mko imara na wala hamkuyumba
Kwa kweli hamkutuacha mpaka mwisho wa kazi*

The contest was difficult
We praise the Party and government leaders
Truly, you are stable and unshaken
You were together with us until when the job was done

*Kweli sisi wana Gombeka hakika twajipongeza
Kwani kampeni tulianza toka mwezi wa pili tisini na tano
Kwani tuliendesha hadi tukafanikiwa
Tunayo shangwe hakika kwa ushindi wa CCM*

We, members of Gombeka
As we started the campaign from February ninety five
We campaigned and won
We rejoice for the victory of CCM.

(The second fool enters and asks):

*Napenda kuuliza hasa kwa ndugu yule Mrema
Kampeni alipiga sehemu nyingi alikwenda
Watu walimshangilia na gari walimsukuma
Na sasa kapiga chini ilikuwaje jamani?*

I want to ask a question about Mrema
He campaigned in many places
People cheered him and pushed his car
Now he has fallen down, what happened?

The establishment of *Gombeka* prompted the NCCR-Mageuzi party to establish the *Ukombozi* cultural troupe to challenge groups that were under the patronage of the CCM party. *Ukombozi* was established in March 1995 and it performs *Nnindo*, *Msunyunho*, *Mheme*, music ensembles, and *Ngonjera*. The establishment of *Ukombozi* generated fear among the village leadership that the new group would draw more

support from among the Wagogo people than *Nyota-wa-Cigogo*. In a dramatic turn, the village leadership persuaded the Wagogo people to establish three more cultural groups. These new groups—*Muungano*, *Simba* and *Mbuni*—were formed in July 1995, and specialised in performing the indigenous dances of the Wagogo.

All six groups participated actively in local campaigns for the first multiparty presidential and parliamentary elections of 1995. During the campaigns, *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* toured all round Ugogo to campaign for CCM's presidential and parliamentary candidates. *Nyota-wa-Cigogo*, together with other groups that were carefully selected campaigned strongly to persuade the Wagogo to vote for the CCM party. Due to their successful campaigns, CCM won in all constituencies in Dodoma, and the presidential votes in this region were among the highest in the country.¹⁵¹

After the 1995 elections, the *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* cultural troupe was faced with several challenges, among which were diminished requests for performances. This was a result of Party and government festivals and celebrations becoming few and far between. Additionally, the large number of music groups in the village—most of them performing similar forms of song and dance—eroded *Nyota-wa-Cigogo*'s monopoly in presiding over local ceremonies and festivals. They now had to compete with other groups for the opportunity to perform. *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* partly blames the village authorities for this problem. As the village leadership encouraged the establishment of most of these groups to campaign for the CCM candidates during the 1995 general elections, it did not occur to them that the groups would continue to exist after the elections and thus pose a problem of having too many performance troupes in on village with a total population of 2,203 people.¹⁵²

Furthermore, the strongest challenge to *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* comes from the *Ukombozi* music troupe which was under the patronage of NCCR-Mageuzi. *Ukombozi* received support from majority of the Wagogo people in Majeleko village, irrespective of their political orientation. This is because the performance content of *Ukombozi*—which has the same repertoire as *Nyota-wa-Cigogo*—is considered by most Wagogo to be more relevant to their community than that

¹⁵¹ Interview with Abraham Tawe, the then Dodoma regional cultural officer; July 1996.

¹⁵² Source of information: Majeleko Ward Government Office.

of *Nyota-wa-Cigogo*. The content is mainly on local issues that are of immediate concern to the Majeleko people. *Ukombozi*'s content is also devoid of praises for the NCCR-Mageuzi party and its policies. As a matter of fact, it is difficult to identify the group as belonging to NCCR-Mageuzi by assessing their performance content, as they do not even mention the name of the party or its leaders. This is contrary to the performance content of groups under the CCM party, most of which mention the Party's name and names of the Party leaders irrespective of the relevance to the particular song.

The support *Ukombozi* gets from among the Wagogo has forced the village leadership to invite the group to perform with other groups during public events. However, whilst those groups supported by CCM are allowed to harangue the opposition publicly, *Ukombozi* is not allowed to do the same. The group is censored and threatened by the local leadership and sometimes its artistes are punished. During a research visit to Majeleko village in July 1996, for example, it was revealed that the village leadership prohibited *Ukombozi* to sing songs that would intimidate the ruling party in public. The artistes were threatened with punishment and denial of future chances for public performance if they sang songs which would disgrace "*chama tawala*" (the ruling party). The group members knew that the village authorities would implement their threats and opted to sing other songs.¹⁵³ To quote Meshack, the artistic leader of *Ukombozi* group, "*we would have wanted to sing and harangue CCM, but we have been told by the village leadership not to sing such songs when they invite us here.*"¹⁵⁴

Meshack went on to explain that his group did not waste time on what he called 'useless songs', but instead express or discuss issues of concern in their village, as the following song demonstrates:

*Wote wa mikoa yote ya hapa Tanzania
Na hasa wa vyama vya siasa
Tunasema kodi tunayoilipa
Watoto wetu hawana madawati huko shuleni*

¹⁵³ Interview with Meshack, the leader of *Ukombozi* cultural troupe in Majeleko village. Meshack further informed me that immediately after the general elections in 1995 some artists of *Ukombozi* group were accused of insulting the ruling party leaders and were remanded locally for a week. The Wagogo elders were angered and ordered their release. They were released on condition that they should refrain from haranguing the ruling party, especially when performing before an audience from outside the village.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Meshack, the leader of *Ukombozi*.

Kodi tunayoilipa lakini hatupati madawa
Kodi tunayoilipa barabara zetu kweli ni mbovu

Sasa ni kazi kubwa kwa serikali yetu ya awamu ya tatu
Kujenga shule zetu katika vijiji
Elimu ni muhimu kwa sisi Watanzania
Kujenga barabara zetu katika vijiji
Usafiri ni muhimu kwa sisi Watanzania
Kujenga zahanati katika vijiji
Afya ni muhimu kwa sisi Watanzania

People from all regions in Tanzania
Especially those belonging to political parties
We are saying that we pay tax
Our children do not have desks in schools
We pay tax but we do not get medicines
We pay tax; our roads are in a dilapidated condition

Now it is a big task to the third-phase government
To build schools in villages
Education is essential to us Tanzanians
To build roads in villages
Transport is essential to us Tanzanians
To build dispensaries in villages
Health is essential to us Tanzanians.

This song is a call to the government to spend the money collected from tax to serve the people. According to the leader of the *Ukombozi* troupe, the song is directed at the Majeleko village council which uses coercive methods in collecting tax from people, yet embezzles the money instead of spending it to improve social services and infrastructure. The song has been composed such that it discusses the issue in question intelligently. The song identifies the problem, analyses it, and offers some solution. It is unlike the *Ngonjera* by *Gombeka* earlier described, or most of the songs by groups supported by CCM.

The continued restrictions to the groups that support the opposition by the ruling party demonstrates its desperation to restore control over the populist music movement, which it enjoyed under the monoparty political system. Artists only said what the leaders wanted to hear. Currently, the powers of the ruling party over artistic groups are limited to cultural events it organises or the festivals and celebrations it hosts, which are diminishing in number.

Throughout its historical development, *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* has only changed slightly as far as its performance structure is concerned. Its

format is mainly linear, like in most populist music groups. Moreover, most of its songs still praise the leadership and contain political propaganda. In addition, similar to many other populist groups, *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* has no costumes. The entire troupe dresses in a uniform that is normally campaign attire of the same design, given to all campaign participants regardless of their role. *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* retains these uniforms to use on many other occasions.

Nyota-wa-Cigogo: performance

The following description is based upon a performance watched by the author at Majeleko village in 1997. All the other groups in the village, except *Mbuni* offered to perform as well and the village authorities could not deny them the opportunity or else they would be seen to favour *Nyota-wa-Cigogo*. Four groups performed and were filmed; *Nyota-wa-Cigogo*, *Nyati*, *Simba* and *Gombeka*. The performances followed one another continuously with only a short break for dinner and time to re-charge the video-camera battery. The following morning the author watched and filmed *Muungano* group.

The process of watching and recording the performances of these groups in Majeleko village gave a general idea of how village authorities intimidate artistes and hence control freedom of artistic expression. The leadership, for example, decided to let all the groups perform in one venue so that they could monitor what was said. This was against my (the author) wish and that of the groups that had wanted to perform at their own venues. The village leadership paid particular attention when *Ukombozi*'s performance. As soon as *Ukombozi* started performing, the chairman of the village left his seat and stood behind the performers. He remained there until the group ended their performance. It was later revealed that the chairman stood behind *Ukombozi* cultural troupe to intimidate them so that they would refrain from singing songs critical of the Party and the government, in the presence of guests.¹⁵⁵ He was

¹⁵⁵ This information was given to me by Mr. Michael Mkunya, the Majeleko Ward Executive Officer who decided to come forward and give me a lot of information about the village that other leaders were trying to hide from me. He told me at length about the conflicts between the Wagogo and the Wanguu, and the relationship between the leadership and *Ukombozi* cultural troupe. Mr. Mkunya, who offered to be interviewed at midnight and requested not to be recorded, was new to Majeleko and he was not happy with the way the

prepared to intervene and stop the performance if *Ukombozi* had disobeyed the order. These precautions were considered necessary as *Ukombozi* had on several other previous events disobeyed the leadership and publicly berated the Party and the government.

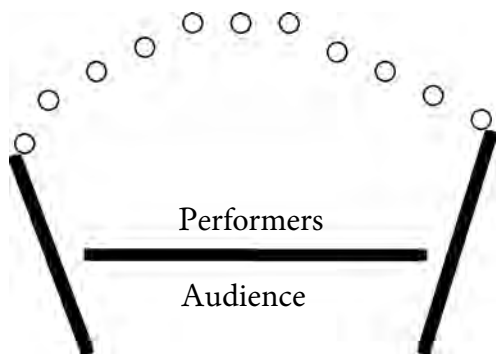
The argument put forth by the leadership was that *Ukombozi* could say whatever they pleased at performances that they themselves organised. However, at those organised by the leadership, the group had to toe the Party line. I argued that *Ukombozi* should be allowed to perform as they pleased as that was the main purpose of my visit to the village. However, this plea was rejected on the grounds that all visitors were under the auspices of the village leadership which had the mandate to organise all their activities in the village for the duration of the visit.

Conversely, as a group under the patronage of CCM, *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* was allowed to say whatever it felt about the opposition. When *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* performed, the leadership was relaxed to the point that the village chairman joined in the dancing. *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* performed four items—*Mheme*, *Nnindo* and *Msunyunho* dances, and a musical ensemble. The performance took place in a specially prepared area under a huge baobab tree. The performers were dressed in colourful *khanga* and t-shirt uniforms, given to them during the 1995 campaign for multiparty elections. The *khanga* and the t-shirts were the official campaign attire, bearing the portrait of the then CCM's presidential candidate Benjamin Mkapa, who is now the President of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mheme

Eleven female performers line up in a semi-circular formation to begin their performance. Seven of the performers have drums. Each carries her drum by holding it under her left armpit.

leadership handled conflicts between the Wagogo and the Wanguu. As a member of the Wagogo ethnic group, Mr. Mkunya was very critical of the way the Wagogo people were being oppressed by the minority Wanguu, who dominate the local leadership hierarchy. However, he was scared to speak his mind publicly for fear of retribution from other leaders. He also spoke to me after I had assured him that the information would only be used for academic purposes.



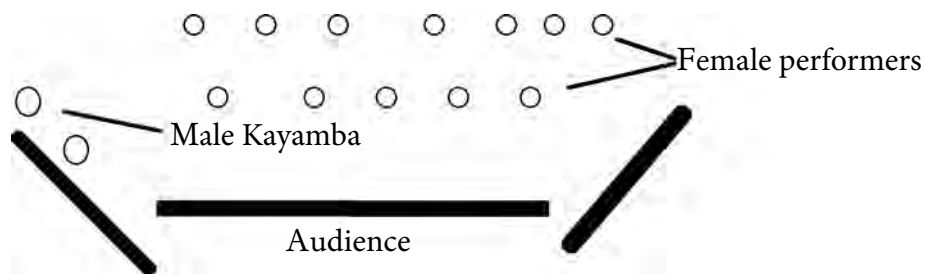
The performance starts as the drummers begin to drum using their right hands. The female performers who do not have drums dance. Their dance is composed of rhythmical, spring-like bounces with their upper body moving to the left and right. As soon as the drumming and dancing starts, the group begins singing. The song praises a girl called Majimbi for her stunning beauty. She is referred to in this song as *kishanga* (a necklace) which, in the Kigogo language is used to mean a very beautiful girl. The song is as follows:

Mphola Cisanga Cangu
*Cimajimbi gwe lije hee.*¹⁵⁶

Look my beautiful necklace
 She is called Majimbi

After singing and dancing for a while, the dance stops. The group rearranges itself into a double-file formation facing the semi-circular audience. There are five drummers in the front line. Two drummers and other dancers form the rear line. The two drummers in the rear keep the tempo. As soon as they take their positions, the drummers put their drums between their legs where the drums will remain for the rest of the performance. As they start drumming, two male *Kayamba* players enter the performing place dancing and playing their *Kayamba*. They dance around the performance area and position themselves on the right side of other performers.

¹⁵⁶ This song and all the Kigogo songs quoted throughout the thesis were translated into Kiswahili by Gloria Rehema Balisidya. The English translation is mine.



As soon as the *Kayamba* players have positioned themselves, the song leader, who is among the drummers, begins to sing. The singing is accompanied by a basic beat (rather close to a minim beat) played at the same time by all the drummers. The song is as follows:

*Agwe Nyamiti nabita gwe iye
Muhinza nagwe wezinjenda gwe
Ninga waghomaza. Wakutya ninga
Sura yako ikwendeza ne mijendele
Ikwendeza oihe ninga nakusola
Cijende gwe ninga waghomaza*

Kiswahili translation

*Kiwembe imara Tanzania CCM na kiko tayari kuwanyoa wapinzani
Kipindi cha mavuno kimefika kuanzia kwenye uraisi na hata kwenye ubunge na wewe
mgombe utavuna ulichopanda
Jamani asiye na mwana ayalieleka jiwe...
Na Mkaapa anasema tupo tayari kwa mapambano
Chipulunje anasema...
CCM oyeoye yeyeyeye Dodoma*

Nyamiti I am leaving you
You are a girl of bad behaviour
You have annoyed me
They say you have a beautiful face
You walk nicely
I took you for a walk
However, you have annoyed me.

The CCM is the sharpest razor in Tanzania and it is ready to shave the opposition
The harvesting season is here and everyone shall reap what he has sown
The one who has no baby should carry a stone
Mkaapa says we are ready to confront our enemies
Chibulunje says we are ready to confront our enemies
Hurrah CCM in Dodoma

Each verse of the above song is sung twice. The leader starts by speaking a few words from the phrase and the rest of the performers respond by singing the whole phrase.

The example above demonstrates the nature of songs commonly sung by many rural based populist music groups. The song starts with the first verse in Kigogo followed by the second verse in Kiswahili. The Kiswahili verse praises the Party, President William Mkapa and Mr. Chibulunje (the CCM's MP for Chilonwa Constituency). The Kigogo text talks about love and a relationship in which Nyamiti (a girl's name) is accused of bad behaviour despite her beauty. The Kiswahili text talks about election campaigns and showers words of praise on the leaders. The use of different languages to address different issues is typical in most populist groups. This trend raises a fundamental question on whether the political content reflects what the performers believe or whether it is merely a strategy to win the support and patronage of the Party and the government. When questioned as to the reason for singing political in both Kiswahili and the vernacular, the respondents insisted that being Wagogo, they had to sing in Kigogo as well as in Kiswahili. It is probable that the Kigogo text was meant for the Wagogo people and the Kiswahili was meant for politicians.

As the singing and drumming continue, the *Kayamba* players move around making gestures and dramatising certain words or phrases in the songs. This dramatisation is a recent phenomenon in *Mheme* dance and belongs solely to *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* cultural troupe. It was introduced to the group in early 1996 when the group was preparing for its first performance tours to Dar es Salaam. The dramatisation was added to make *Mheme* dance dramatically expressive and hence easily understood by people who were not Wagogo.

As soon as the song finishes, rigorous drumming begins and the performers shake their shoulders in time to the different rhythms of the drums. This part of the dance involves only the seven drummers and the *Kayamba* players. The other performers just stand back and watch. The drummers first perform while standing in their positions, but after a while each moves forward in turn and displays her skill in drumming. Meanwhile the *Kayamba* players shuffle around, expertly playing their *Kayamba* (the word is used for both singular and plural). The performance continues for a while and then it stops and the performers walk out.

Nnindo

Male and female performers enter the performing stage randomly and form one horizontal and two vertical lines facing the audience. The horizontal line is for men; the vertical lines are for the women. The women's lines are opposite each other to the left and right of men's line. Two of the women are adorned with hats made of animal skin. These two women are the stars of the dance who, during the performance, perform the neck-oscillating dance. The dance-leader—who stands in the middle of the performance space—is also adorned with an animal hide hat and 'mbega', which are two hairy pieces of monkey hide tied to his upper arms so that they stick out behind him (see also Kaduma, 1972: 77).

The dance leader steers the performers through the following songs by introducing a few words in each stanza and the performers respond by singing the whole stanza. The songs discuss different issues and are responded to differently by the performers. In the first song, the performers stand still, but they portray a gesture of sadness and sorrow by putting their right hands across their chests as their left hands are supporting their heads. The song goes:

*Kweli Watanzania wote tunasikitika sana
Tena tunayo majonzi makubwa sana
Baba Mkapa anasikitika
Pia anayo majonzi makubwa sana
Na Omari anasikitika
Pia anayo majonzi makubwa sana
Na Sumaye anasikitika
Pia anayo majonzi makubwa sana
Na Mwinyi anasikitika
Pia anayo majonzi makubwa sana
Malecela anasikitika
Pia anayo majonzi makubwa sana
Tumeliputiwa na bomu kubwa
Lililotikisa nchi yetu
Tumepata msiba huko Bukoba kwa ajali ya meli
Tumepoteza zaidi ya watu mia tano
Pole ndugu zetu wote mliofiwa
Pole wenzetu wa Kagera
Pole wenzetu wa Mara
Pole wenzetu wa kule mjini Mwanza
Tunalia baba eeh, tunalia baba eeh
Pole pole Watanzania wote kwa huruma pamoja na mimi
Tena tunashukuru ndugu zetu Afrika ya kusini pamoja na Kenya na Uganda na hata*

Tanzania

*Kwa kazi kubwa waliyoifanya ya kuokoa maiti waliokuwemo ndani ya meli
Asante tunashukuru*

We Tanzanians are grieving
We are deeply sorry
Mkapa, our father, is grieving
And is deeply sorry
Omary also is grieving
And he is deeply sorry
Mwinyi also is grieving
And he is deeply sorry
Malecela is grieving
And he is deeply sorry
A fatal bomb has exploded
And shaken the whole country
A capsized ship in Bukoba has brought us adversity
We have lost more than five hundred people
We are in sympathy with members of the deceased
We are in sympathy with our fellow Tanzanians from Kagera
We are in sympathy with our fellow Tanzanians from Mara
We are in sympathy with our fellow Tanzanians from the municipality of Mwanza
We are crying father! Father!
We are in sympathy with all Tanzanians
We thank our brothers from South Africa, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania
For the great job to rescue the bodies which were trapped in the ship.
Thanks. We thank you.

The song mourns those that died when the MV Bukoba (a passenger ship on Lake Victoria) capsized on 21 May 1996. It is believed that more than eight hundred people were drowned. In this song, *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* follows the populist music tradition by mentioning a list of government leaders whom they praise for mourning those who died in the tragedy. However, mentioning national leaders in this song does not add any value to its content. Nevertheless, the populist tradition demands that the leaders be mentioned, regardless of whether they are involved in the issue discussed or not.

The performance of *Nnindo* ends when the singing and dancing stops. The performers walk out of the performance area and prepare for the next item.

Msunyunho

Performers enter the performance area stand in the same way as in the *Nnindo* dance. A leading dancer stands in the middle and leads the dancers in singing the following song:

*Mwime aliiwanza lyangu mze mlanje
Hee wela, saje mawanza wasimbile mogaya
Ase cakondyafika wana wa Nyota-wa- Cigogo iye
Aihe ase cakondya fika, nye laini yangu
Wela ahe alenyi wose abite ciwabocele
Wajenzi wakondya fika. Wajenzi wetu awano
Wajenzi hono waza ciduwane cilece viswanu
Ase waco nye cwayenyu cazowela
Umduwo ne wajenzi ahano laini yose*

*Lyaya nhawule gwe
Lyaya gwe izala lyaleta ulugu kononze
Licisumile linamilewo mikamu hono
Mwina ne migoha izala lyocibahula
Colokwikala nemilango colodinda
Izala walume gwe
Izala si idodo hakutya hanji baha
Hamba muhwela nye gwe
Hamba muhwele izala lyina ulugu
Lyolyamala ne wakoko*

Stand up and come to watch my group
The day has started
Dance hard, the other groups are angry with us
Do not waste your time we are here now
The day has started
Let us all go to welcome our guests
Let us talk nicely with them and go home in peace
You know us
We are the ones who talk to guests when they visit this area.

Mother! mother!
Famine has brought us disaster
It is killing us
Even if you have spears
Even if you lock yourself indoors
You cannot defeat famine
Men, this famine is catastrophic
Some people say
Your worries notwithstanding
Famine is the warlord
It killed our ancestors

The above song discusses two separate issues in each of the two verses. The first verse is an introduction in which the performers invite the audience to watch the performance. The performers boast that *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* is the only group in the village that is qualified to perform to visitors. The phrase, “*we are the only ones who talk with guests in this area*”, asserts the role of *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* as a populist group whose major function is to perform for guests and visitors. The second verse of the song talks about famine, a day-to-day reality in Ugogo as most people live in areas where crop failure is frequent. The song expresses the difficulties in getting rid of the famine which in most cases is caused by catastrophes such as “*floods, swarms of locusts, epizootic and the recurrence of severe droughts*.”¹⁵⁷

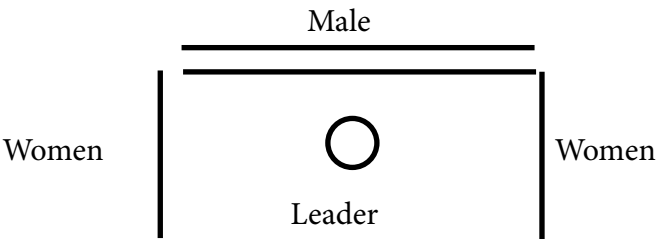
Musical Ensemble

It is very difficult to distinguish a dance performance from a musical performance among the Wagogo performance traditions, as both make use of movements, vocal and instrumental music. Most musical ensembles consist of groups of instrumentalists and their supporters who sing and dance. But although during these musical ensembles people dance, the Wagogo do not call the performances ‘dance’. They argue that the emphasis in these musical ensemble performances is on music and not dance. Dance is spontaneously performed only after people have been emotionally inspired. However, this is true when a solo musician performs, but where a group of musicians gather together to play their instruments, dance has always been a necessary component of the performance. Furthermore, in these ensembles even the instrumentalists themselves dance along with the others. The following description demonstrates that there is hardly any difference in performance format between the music ensemble and dances such as *Mheme*.

The music ensemble performance begins when performers enter the venue and line up in horizontal and vertical lines facing the audience. All the men carry musical instruments and form two lines facing the audience. The front line consists of four performers, each carrying an *Irimba*. The back line consists of five *Izeze* players. Women

¹⁵⁷ Clarke Brooke, ‘The heritage of Famine in Central Tanzania’ in *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 62 (June 1996), 15 – 22 (p. 15).

place themselves in two lines facing each other. Each line has six performers.



The leader, who is standing in the middle of the performing area, starts the performance by playing a brief tune on his *Izeze*. The men follow immediately by playing their musical instruments and swaying their upper bodies to the left and right rhythmically, while making simultaneous stamps with their feet. The women dance by moving their torsos in the same way as in *Nnindo* or *Msunyunho* except that they move their hands in different patterns. These patterns are symbolic and represent different farming activities such as cultivation, picking, and weeding. The patterns have actually been derived from communal farming activities that involve songs and rhythmic movements either in hoeing, weeding or picking. Similar dance movements are also common during the *Kugubika Cipeyu* (beer parties organised in the evenings to thank those who participated in the communal farming during the day).

Conclusion

The words “*Amicus Plato, sed magis amicus veritas*” (I am Plato’s friend, but I am more of a friend of truth) are attributed to Aristotle. In this we agree entirely with Aristotle: We are his friends, but we are much better friends of truth. He tells us that poetry, tragedy, and theater have nothing to do with politics. But reality tells us something else. His own Poetics tells us it is not so. We have to be better friends of reality: All of many activities including, of course, all the arts, especially theatre—are political.¹⁵⁸

Within the major contemporary scholarships in Tanzanian arts,

¹⁵⁸ . Boal, A., *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 1979).

particularly the works of Amandina Lihamba (1985), Jane Plastow (1991 & 1996), Siri Lange (1995), and Askew Kelly (2002) a major emphasis is placed on the fact that the history of arts in Tanzania is political and it has been shaped and influenced by all political changes that have taken place in Tanzania before and after independence. This paper acknowledges the contribution of the above mentioned scholars by analysing the relationship between politics and music in Tanzania. The paper first discussed and highlighted the popular musical forms in Tanzania, where it pointed out that politics had significant influence to the developments and changes in those musical forms. For example, the Arusha Declaration contributed to the rise and popularisation of forms of music such as *Ngonjera* and *Kwaya*.

The paper has also discussed the major landmarks in the political history of Tanzania and their influences in music. The attainment of independence and the subsequent establishment of the Ministry of Culture in 1962, The Arusha Declaration, Party supremacy, and the establishment of multiparty political system, have all influenced changes in music in some way.

Nyota-wa-Cigogo has been used as a case study to underscore the development and changes of music within different political epochs in Tanzania. *Nyota-wa-Cigogo* was established during the *Ujamaa* period, survived through the era of party supremacy, reached its highest level of popularity during the transitional period to multiparty political system, and received intense competition during the first multiparty elections in 1995 when many other groups were established to campaign for CCM and the opposition parties.

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Hip-Hop, Westernization and Gender in East Africa

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Introduction

The end of the 20th Century saw an increase in cultural flows and exchange across many of the world's different nations and peoples due to an intensified interaction and exchange made possible by the process of globalisation. While this process has been seen from different perspectives including some doubting its credibility as a process in the first place, it is quite clear that the process of Westernization which predates globalisation has intensified across the larger part of the developing world. In East Africa, this process has been on-going for many years and it has produced various facets of cultural expressions that have taken different forms and picked up different definitions. Increase in Western cultural products such as movies, music, and dress has continually influenced many facets of culture in the region. For instance, the culture embodied in rap music and expressed through urban styles of dress and speech often associated with urban African-American youth constitutes a genre referred to as hip-hop (Rose, 1994). This culture is one aspect of the process of Westernization and globalisation found in East Africa. Thus a hip-hop culture has continually developed on the East African urban scene since the early 1990s and has taken on some localized form and content. What is not clear though is whether this cultural form is indeed a local indigenous East African hip-hop or a Western (American) hip-hop expressed and mediated through local cultural and creative processes. Furthermore,

it is not quite clear whether there is distinct and identifiable Kenyan, Tanzanian and Ugandan hip-hop within such geopolitical enclaves. However, an internet search for hip-hop in each of these three countries would result in numerous entries thus denoting a presence of hip-hop in these three countries.¹⁵⁹ Many popular music groups in East Africa perform rap music and the musicians themselves try to build a specific culture around it. Such a culture is built around the live performance antics and mode of dress. Some artistes try out specific designs of apparel such as Kenya's Fundi Frank, who himself tried his hand at rap music while in Mombasa. Performers on stage are often seen making hand gestures, grabbing their crotches, and holding the microphone in a manner identical to that seen on many rap music videos on America's popular music channel MTV.

There are thus local appropriations of this style expressed through music and performance. In Tanzania, hip-hop takes on a specific local identity signified by the term *Bongo Flava* which loosely translates taste or flavour of Dar es Salaam.¹⁶⁰ In Kenya Sync Sound and Ogopa DJs premiered the hip-hop culture with full-length CD compilations of Kenyan hip-hop music featuring various artistes who had not been publicly heard on radio stations. In Uganda, musicians such as Kawesa, Bébé Cool, and Chameleon have had to move to Nairobi to develop their music careers.

Despite all this activity around hip-hop, very little study seems to have been done on it in East Africa except for a few works on specific countries (cf. Fenn and Perullo; Remes; “*Karibu*”; “*Global*”; and Haas and Gesthuizen on Tanzania; Robensdorf (n.d.) and Nyairo and Ogude on Kenya). This scarce scholarly work on hip-hop in East Africa is, however, dwarfed by the numerous newspaper articles and internet sites that continually write about hip-hop in East Africa in general and

¹⁵⁹ A more specific search would benefit from www.Africanhiphop.com, a site managed by a Dutch NGO, Madunia, which seeks to promote African hip-hop through the internet. Its webmaster Thomas Gesthuizen (Juma4) got involved in Tanzanian hip-hop musician as early as 1993.

¹⁶⁰ Since the late 1980s when Julius Nyerere's experimentation with African socialism (*Ujamaa*) failed and a socio-economic ideology shaped by capitalism came in, Dar es Salaam specifically and Tanzania in general started to be referred to as *Bongoland* (a land of the brains, *bongo* is brains in Kiswahili) to denote the move from a collective consciousness that nationalised most public enterprises to individual efforts to survive propelled by one's use of his/her brains.

on specific East African countries and artistes. The flourishing presence of articles in the internet about East African hip-hop is reflective of the flourishing Western influence on music and popular expression in East Africa that I argue has continued to inspire and shape hip-hop styles in East Africa. The names of music groups, the styles of dress that centre around brand name apparel, and the art form of the music have a distinct African-American stamp on them. Yet many of the lyrics are rooted in the local cultural experiences and expressions often present in much of general popular music found in East Africa. There is also quite a large representation of hip-hop music that is performed for its entertainment value alone.

This chapter examines the emerging hip-hop cultural expression in urban popular music in East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania) and the appropriation and reshaping of Western cultural practices to a local reality. It argues that rather than being looked at as mere aping of Western styles, East African hip-hop engenders a very specific local identity that is reflective of a history of colonial domination and a Western-inspired cultural identity. Also examined is how gender as a framework of analysis allows for an understanding and appreciation of hip-hop as a means of expressing gendered identities and realities. To achieve this, a few hip-hop artistes from the three East African countries have been selected as case studies. Their music has been well received in much of the region and beyond especially in the period between 1999 and early 2004. This chapter also analyses a lengthy exchange over an internet chat forum sponsored by www.africanhiphop.com where three Tanzanian men define their understanding of hip-hop in a manner that allows for the expression of extremely individualised definitions of Westernization. In the process, widely-held notions of what it is to be African and Western in the same frame are revealed.

The Emergence of Hip-Hop in East Africa

While it is possible to link the emergence of hip-hop in East Africa to the presence of Western popular culture through radio, television and film that intensified in the 1980s through the 1990s, certain political

and socio-economic changes in the region precipitated the culture of expression realized today as hip-hop. The lure of the West has been a constant presence in the lives of East Africans since their nations were created through arbitrary colonial demarcations and subsequent occupation following the 1883 Berlin Conference, often referred to as the “*Scramble for Africa*.” With colonisation came the systematic demeaning and erosion of local practices and worldviews where local (African) cultural practices were demonised and branded inferior in favour of western cultural values presented by the colonisers and their ‘allies’ such as missionaries, educators and travellers. Hence it was not ‘hip’ to be African but Western; the more Western one was the more the social status one received. However, a ray of hope seemed to emerge in the 1950s when nationalism took root in East Africa. This was markedly so following an expanded worldview brought back by some soldiers who participated in the Second World War of the mid-1940s. Additionally, the three first presidents of the three East African nations had had contact with such influential figures as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. The latter led his country to be the first free Black African nation and, after returning from the West (especially America), sought an Afro-centric political destiny for the continent of Africa. This initial Afro-centric coalition led to the formation of the Pan African movement that drew its first support from Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere and Milton Obote (all who were first presidents in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda respectively). Their Pan African identities were shaped quite differently in their respective countries with Kenyatta seeking to “Kenyanise” all public sectors while following a strong capitalist ethic; Nyerere choosing to totally reject capitalism for an afro-centric socialist ethic he called *Ujamaa*. This denoted a structure built on an African sense of filial practice where people belonged and operated under one big family structure. Obote settled for a mixture of the two while acknowledging a strong ethnic chauvinism expressed through historically established political systems of the Uganda kingdoms. Despite these seemingly afro-centric intentions in the political leadership of East African countries, structures for a Western cultural hegemony remained intact and were expressed through the presence of the church, schools, legal system, as well as political and economic structures that were never really African to begin with. The West continued to dictate the political and economic

practices of East African that were then transferred to their cultural systems as well.

The single party political structure took root in East Africa and cultural expression was largely shaped by the whims of the state and the ruling party. In Kenya and Tanzania, the ruling parties (KANU and TANU respectively) sponsored music groups and bands to perform 'national' songs during national holidays and celebrations. Most alternative popular music performances often avoided politically-charged messages and instead chose messages of love and 'feel-good' themes. Others became increasingly religious. Exceptions such as Tanzania's popular musician Remmy Ongala sung songs that became important outlets for cultural and ideological dissent. State-owned radio and television stations were flooded with cheap yet captivating Western cultural products in the form of music, soap operas and movies or local comedies that did not threaten the authority of the state over its people. Any social or political dissidence was quickly quashed, quite often with the blessings of the West. The western desire to maintain political hegemony was expressed through the Cold War (ideological struggles between capitalism and communism) in which economic support was pegged to ideological agreements. Tyrannical single party states in East Africa were condoned in the name of ideological war. Alternative cultural expressions were almost always seen as threatening the status quo and thus discouraged all together.

Following the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the IMF and World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) that forced countries in East Africa to depend on the West even more, Western cultural expressions became not only indicators of modernity but also icons of change for a struggling economic and political nation-state. Due to its open capitalist agenda, Kenya received most of the Western attention and economic assistance that came along with a cultural package. As a result Kenya became a truly Westernized post-colonial state where the majority of its citizens preferred Western cultural products over its own. This was in sharp contrast to Tanzania where President Julius Nyerere continually implored his citizens to think African and act African (his insistence on wearing *Kaunda*¹⁶¹ suits

¹⁶¹ These suits named after the first Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda were a combination of matching short-sleeved shirt and pair of trousers that needed no accompanying tie and

rather than Western style suits was an afrocentric cultural statement). It is in this context that we may understand the widespread appropriation of American dance styles and music in Kenya of James Brown and Jim Reeves in the 1970s and later in the 1980s the break-dancing craze of and disc jockey innovations on the turntable called 'scratching'. This consisted of songs changed on the spot by pushing them back and forth as they played to produce a scratching effect. This sound, in combination with some added sounds by the disc jockey produced a new style of music.¹⁶² This was in response to the expanding hip-hop style in New York that bore its roots in the ability for a disc jockey to competitively 'scratch' to produce a combination of sounds that when combined with innovative sounds from other songs and short repetitive lyrics gave birth to rap music (Rose, 1994). I remember the years of 'scratching' and break-dancing in the 1980s when I was in college trying to imitate the stars as I saw on break-dance motion pictures. They were also represented in my sketches. Particularly memorable is a picture I drew of a break-dancer doing a head-spin on top of the Kenyatta International Conference Centre. This craze was represented by an emerging local fashion and grooming where for the first time I saw a young man with curly wet hair similar to some of the actors (Shabba-Doo and Boogaloo-Shrimp) in the break-dance movie produced in 1984 called *Breakin' 2 Electric Boogaloo*. This cultural influence was seeping through to young people who came from middle and upper class homes where television and videos were emerging as the preferred modes of entertainment.

In both public and private secondary schools (where many East African youth had their first true multi-ethnic encounters) Western ideals became idolized. Those lucky enough to be closer to the centres of Western cultural production through travel or mediated appropriation were highly respected. Many young East Africans saw their cultural survival pegged to their ability to be as Western as possible; studying abroad became a cherished trophy by many and as Binyavanga Wainana poignantly points out, it became the new indicator of an emerging local identity:

were often considered local in opposition to Western-style suit and tie.

¹⁶² (Editor's note) "Scratching is the manipulation of a sound sample either on vinyl or on CD, to produce a new sound effect". John Rabar, *Homeboyz DJ*.

We all wanted to study in the US. Those of us who felt we were off-centre, who felt we had a social conscience, and some sort of interest in the future of Kenya, were convinced that study in a small White liberal arts college in the US would provide solutions. We would sit high up in the UN someday, in New York, and direct matters to the satisfaction of our continent. This way, we could ensure that we were able to socialise at the highest levels of society, meet R&B musicians, have tickets to fly anywhere, anytime; have enough money to support our extended families in the villages back home, and have sufficient policy influence to recreate the continent in the image we saw it. People would have enough money to wear cool clothes, everybody would have to study the classical popular hip-hop of the 1980s; we would declare a universal African accent in English, which would sound funky, maybe vaguely Jamaican, Kiswahili would be banned (our reasoning was that English was the language of international business, how would development happen if people spoke Kiswahili?).

The hip-hop music of the 1980s that Wainaina mentions above was the music of choice for many urban East Africans. Radio stations played American R&B songs that soon became popular among many. In Dar es Salaam, budding musicians and other entrepreneurs would use the beats and styles of those popular songs and insert their own lyrics in Kiswahili.¹⁶³ In this way, they could have a piece of the West in a linguistic medium of their own.

A new wave of political and economic change swept across East Africa in the early 1990s as multiparty democracy became a recognisable ideology in every household. All of a sudden the IMF and World Bank pegged economic assistance to East African countries on their political and economic pluralism. In Kenya, this meant the end of the one-party state. This euphoria for change from one-party state to multi-party democracy saw the mobilisation of young people who for the first time seemed to be genuinely welcome to participate in the cultural and political destiny of their countries. Numerous political parties began using music as avenues for the expression of their political vision and ideology. Many had strong agendas for including the youth in key political decision-making processes in an unprecedented manner.

¹⁶³ In 1991, for instance, Swaleh J compiled an album entitled Swahili rap which used Vanilla Ice's song "Ice Ice Baby" with Kiswahili lyrics. Hakim and Abdul through their musical group *Contish* followed suit by singing Kiswahili lyrics to the music of Shabba Ranks in their album entitled *Mabishoo*, aptly called Swahili Rap and produced in 1993. In Kenya DJs often recorded music on tape and sold it to willing buyers who were following the music scene closely. Florida 2000 nightclub in Nairobi, for instance, continually provided recorded music of the latest hits on Western music charts that was often sold in local stores.

Everyone and anyone could sell anything in East Africa. Peddlers of cultural products such as music had booming business; pirating of Western music and film became the order of the day. One could walk along the busy streets of Kampala, Dar es Salaam or Nairobi and buy any music on video or CD for half the original price. Street vendors complete with television sets and CD players were at hand to test your music before you purchased it. Name brand apparel as well as painting on public transportation became a new craze in Kenya. Posters and art on public spaces reflected hip-hop culture from the US and rap groups gradually emerged in the economic capitals of East Africa—Kampala, Dar es Salaam, and Nairobi. Due to many years of civil strife, the Ugandan hip-hop scene mostly developed through contact with other East African locations, especially Nairobi and other areas where many musicians migrated to. The rest of its popular music development remained rooted in traditional styles that included praise singing in local spaces deemed safe from the threat of a punitive state apparatus that had prevailed in Uganda for ages.

Meanwhile, hip-hop music groups slowly started emerging in East Africa. The most recognised debut hip-hop artistes in Kenya and Tanzania were Kalamashaka and Kwanza Unit respectively, who despite their popularity in the 1990s slowly went into oblivion in the 2000s. In Kenya, Harrison Ngunjiri (popularly known as Hardstone) was the first artiste to record and release a full-length CD entitled *Uhiki* whose title song became a hit in East Africa. He later moved to the US to continue his budding music career only to find the so called ‘land of milk and honey’ not quite what he had imagined.¹⁶⁴ Kalamashaka only reigned for about six years and by 2003, they had already dwindled into a life of poverty and with no signs of the glamour that once followed their hip-hop presence in East Africa and beyond.¹⁶⁵ Kwanza Unit slowly disintegrated as one of the key members died and the other moved to Canada.¹⁶⁶ Despite this slowing down of pioneer hip-hop artistes, East Africa is ablaze with new stars who, due to the proliferation of FM radio

¹⁶⁴ See Dan Teng’s article entitled ‘Pioneer Kenyan hip-hop star on a comeback trail’, in *The Daily Nation*, 22 June 2003.

¹⁶⁵ See Carol Nyanga’s article, ‘The fall and fall of Kalamashaka’, in the Pulse Magazine of the *East African Standard*, 20 February, 2004 for a full story of this “rags to riches to rags” story.

¹⁶⁶ See www.africanhiphop.com or <http://www.africaonline.co.tz/rockers/bprofiles2.htm> for more information on this group.

stations, have managed to carve an imposing presence in the popular music arena.

Hip-Hop in East Africa: a new phenomenon or old tradition?

Despite the overwhelming evidence that hip-hop as currently expressed in East Africa has observable African-American roots, it is easy to see that it is so widespread because it is not exactly a new phenomenon. When we focus on form and style in rap music, for instance, there is a resemblance to the praise-singing traditions observable across the continent of Africa. Thus hip-hop may be a new phenomenon in East Africa, but its basic structure is African. This has been expressed by many ethnomusicologists especially in comparative studies done on African music and on the music of people of African descent in the New World (DjeDje, 1999). Thus as Pangie Anno from Ghana told a reporter for BBC World Service, *“the source of hip-hop is an African tradition, and ancient African tradition of freestyling, which is spontaneous poetry to a rhythmic pattern.”*¹⁶⁷

Kariuki *et al.* (2004) report that the traditional musical style in Uganda consisted of praise singing in the style called *kadongo kamu* that entailed a *...lone musician with his bow lyre, (who) would arrive at a bar (and) play a song for the patrons—all of them friends who know that none of them is a government spy. He would collect his fees and go to the next bar...Today, the modern musicians like Ann Nandojja, Florence Namirimu and Fred Sebatta have mainstreamed kadongo kamu, and found fame, and immense wealth.*

Kadongo kamu developed throughout the colonial period as a means to revive a crumbling cultural identity that was being assaulted by Western values. This music, however, had to *“be defined in a way that would accommodate the new identity which was a hybridisation of foreign and Kiganda cultures, especially in urban areas”* (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2002: 137). This localised state of musical performance led to a culture of live performances with little studio recording. Indeed, the only consistent Ugandan band that has continually recorded its music in Uganda is the Afrigo Band that has consistently drawn large crowds

¹⁶⁷ As recorded at www.news.bbc.co.uk/s/hi/africa/3241007.stm accessed 9 April 2004.

to its recorded and live performances in Uganda. Many other Ugandan popular musicians made it outside Uganda in Kenya or in the West especially as migrants fleeing persecution from Idi Amin or in search of better facilities for recording music. Throughout the 20th century Kenya had been the hub for music recording in East Africa following a large settler population bent on carrying on with the amenities of home in the colony. The latest Ugandan hip-hop sensations—Jose Chameleon and Bébé Cool who rose to the limelight by recording and performing in Kenya where they had migrated to—gained some urban cultural literacy that enabled them to compose songs in a language and style common to many urban Kenyans. A special report published by *The Daily Nation* quotes Bébé Cool as saying

I went to Nairobi because I was desperate. People here (in Kampala) never used to believe in us local artistes. First, they thought we were too young. Secondly, they treated career musicians as if they were criminals in Uganda and anyone who went singing was considered a muyaye (a vagabond).¹⁶⁸

Chameleon also performed some songs in Luganda that did quite well in East Africa including *Bageya*. Unlike much of Tanzanian and Kenyan hip-hop that started by copying American styles, Uganda's hip-hop continues to find strength in traditional styles. However, when it comes to the hip-hop styles in Uganda that are comparable to those in Tanzania and Kenya, there are very few celebrated female artistes similar to Kenya's Wahu and Nazizi or Tanzania's Lady JayDee whose music is popular across much of East Africa. Hence as music becomes less traditional, the more marginalised female artistes were conspicuously absent in Uganda. Indeed, female artistes only constitute less than 10% of hip-hop artistes in East Africa. However, lyrics about women are not absent in East African hip-hop and have tended to dominate many songs by artistes such as Nameless, Deux Vultures, Nonini, Chameleon, the late E-Sir, Kunguru and Lenny, and Redsant. This scenario is not unusual in East African music where women have had very little participation in music-making be it as band leaders, composers or performers (see Ntarangwi, 2003 for examples of some exceptions). In most cases, women perform supportive roles as back-

¹⁶⁸ In 'New Music Exiles Settle in Nairobi,' www.nationmedia.com/dailynation/ posted on March 17, 2004. Many writers and commentators seem to favour writing about the educational achievements of successful hip-hop stars in an attempt to dissuade the youth from seeing it as a genre for thugs as is often depicted in gangster rap.

up singers or as dancers who are often chosen first for their ability to draw the male eye rather than for their dancing prowess.¹⁶⁹ Structurally, therefore, hip-hop is changing the East African scene as more women become composers and singers. In Kenya, for instance, Zanaziki, Mercy Myra, Wahu, Nazizi, and In Tu are examples of female hip-hop artistes who have cultivated an important presence in an otherwise male-dominated genre. The emergence of more female musicians in hip-hop could thus be seen as a new phenomenon in the East African popular music scene.

We could further look at hip-hop in East Africa as the emergence of what James Lull (1995: 145) refers to as “*a new cultural territory*” through a process of deterritorialisation. Thus the styles of hip-hop produced in the USA through rap music become extracted from their original social territory (they become deterritorialised) and were mobilised in East Africa through the process of transculturation, hybridisation, and indigenisation (Androutopoulos and Scholz, 2003). As cultural, economic and political territories opened up in East Africa in the early 1990s, cultural forms mediated through hip-hop were transported from the US (through mass media) to East Africa where they were reshaped and localised. At the end of this process are the final products that are distinctly East African, in a way that is both transient and open-ended. The sounds become indigenised to local musical patterns; the lyrics are sung in local languages or slang and continually make reference to local personalities, social spaces, conditions and events. A song such as *Unbwogable* by Kenya’s hip-hop group Gidi Gidi Maji Maji, although performed over a very Western musical pattern and produced towards the end of 2002, became a local song because of the specificity of the issues to the socio-political terrain in Kenya and the blending of English, Dholuo and Kiswahili in the lyrics. The song was immediately adopted by the unprecedented political alliance in Kenya (NARC) as the anthem and mantra for removing KANU from power in the 2002 national elections. Other songs become more regional despite their original location as in the song *Ndio Mzee*¹⁷⁰ (*Yes Sir*) by Professor Jay from Tanzania. It explores the false promises made to the electorate

¹⁶⁹ This practice seems to have been popularised by musicians from the Democratic Republic of Congo who migrated to other countries in search of greener pastures.

¹⁷⁰ This is the hit song from the album entitled *Machizi, Jasho na Damu* (Tears, Sweat and Blood) produced in 2002.

by politicians who will make absurd promises to the electorate in order to win their votes. One does not need to be Tanzanian to identify with the message of that song but in order to understand the nuances of its expression, some local cultural literacy is necessary. It is in these processes, therefore, that we can see that hip-hop in its current form can clearly point to a Western (American) definition. However, in its localisation, its African roots are evident.

Hip-Hop and Westernization

If Westernization is a process that started decades ago in East Africa, would it be unusual to expect hip-hop to reflect the same trend? This issue seems to have mixed responses going by the newspaper articles and contributions to various chat forums on the internet. On December 22, 1999 Kamau in response to a query by a guest on Africanhiphop's website discussion forum on Kenyan hip-hop says: *"If I want to listen to good hip hop artists I would rather listen to Mosdef, the roots of some other American hip hop artists. Although it is interesting to listen to groups like Kalamashaka for the novelty of hearing rap in Sheng or Kikuyu or Luo, there is something inauthentic about the Kenyan rap I hear."*¹⁷¹

Kamau, writing from the USA seems to question the authenticity of Kenyan rap especially as he holds the American version as the original. Three months later, however, he seems to have changed his position when he says; *"The current issue of the Economist (3/4-3/10 2000) has a story about Kwaito, a music from South Africa that is a modification of American hip hop, but that is in the local languages about township life. It kind of refutes my point that Africans are merely copying American music without adding anything new."*¹⁷²

The notion of authenticity in art forms has been variably debated by many scholars.¹⁷³ Yet in a world that is fast becoming connected through increased flows of people, goods and ideas in the process

¹⁷¹ Found on www.africanhiphop.com accessed 18 January 2004.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, written on March 05, 2000 and accessed 18 January 2004.

¹⁷³ See especially Jean Baudrillard (1983) *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext inc., and Kemal, Salim and Ivan Gaskill eds. (1999) *Performance and Authenticity in the Arts*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

of globalization, authenticity will be a term that may diminish in its importance as traditional or original sources will no longer be identifiable. In the true spirit of freedom of expression embodied in hip-hop, www.africanhiphop.com chat forums hosted a debate entitled “*Why copy American Blacks? Be African Original*” between March 6–8, 2003. In one of the contributions, a participant named Koko asked: “*Why you all African hiphops just copy Black American styles? Can’t you be original and truly African? Look at your videos, your moves, your lyrics and more. Compare yourselves with Black Americans. You are not innovative at all. You just copy. You are flakes...all of you.*”¹⁷⁴

These comments seem to have angered many visitors to this forum and some even expressed intent to physically assault Koko. One guest who signed in as ‘Iwannaslapkoko’ says “*Some cats just make these sweeping comments without backing them up. This kind of comment deserves to be ignored for its ignorance. It was made by someone with very little knowledge of African hip-hop culture.*”

Another visitor, Trae-Z seems to be more accommodating to both points of view—those that say there needs to be some authentic African hip-hop and those who think such an expectation is absurd. Trae-Z says this in support of Iwannaslapkoko: “*Yeah man I feel u. This Koko guy better be ware of the effects of globalisation, and realize that we all learn and borrow from each other, and we don’t always just copy them 100%. Many a times we modify it by adding our own flavour: e.g. Language, and beats, style etc. U better look out for more African hip hop songs before u start criticizing aight. Hope I schooled u.*”

In another forum hosted on the same site and entitled “*Waafrika tuna style*” (do we Africans have style?) posted between November 06, 2001–January 02, 2002, issues about African cultural practices and their contemporary manifestations turned into a heated debate that feminised some male participants on the forum in an attempt to verbally subdue them. In the following part I reproduce a translation into English of some of the exchange that had started as an inquiry on whether certain contemporary cultural practices were African. The exchange is between three individuals, Bongonian, Sosa, and Geeque, all of whom I have assumed are Tanzanian:

¹⁷⁴ These and the next quotes are from www.africanhiphop.com accessed on 8 March 2004.

Name of participant: Bongonian

Location: Arusha, Tanzania

Posted: November 06, 2001

Mluguru you briefly reminded me of these styles as you were educating that person who braids his hair. I am not blaming white nigga but I wish to know if we do things cognizant of our traditions since in Bongo if you braid your hair, wear earrings and chains you are considered a thug yet when I look at history I find that the Maasai used to braid hair, the Kuria pierced their ears and the Makonde adorned tattoos. How come nowadays if you do these things you are seen as unacceptable?

Name of participant: Sosa

Location: Manzese, Tanzania

Posted: November 06, 2001

I would say that braiding is a normal thing except that ever since our elders were colonised they have forgotten our culture and traditions and have turned into colonisers themselves. But there are a lot of people who braid except maybe those living in elite families who are prohibited from it because their parents are against it. But braiding is influenced by your lifestyle so that as an accountant or a lawyer you may not braid your hair but if you live a simple life like me then you can.

Name of participant: Geeque

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Posted: December 27, 2001

I would be happy if you who say that piercing ears or braiding hair is a tradition that has been in Bongo and practised by the Maasai and the Kuria would do so because you follow the practices of these tribes. The problem is that a large percentage of Tanzanians who braid their hair and pierce their ears do so not in copying the Maasai and Luguru but the Americans. If that style was not in America at all and was only practiced by the Maasai and Luguru I doubt that many of you would value and copy it, but because the Americans are doing it then you will readily copy it. I am not here to tell anybody that braiding hair or piercing ears is bad. I think that everybody has their personal style and can make individual decisions, however to link the Maasai to your wearing earrings is deceptive.

Bongonian December 27, 2001

You GQ tell me which American was the first to pierce ears? Stop having a

slave mentality, you need to know your traditions so you won't copy American things. I can tell you that a Black person's hair is the only hair that can be styled variably including dreadlocks yet we know how much we have been against traditional things calling them barbaric. A good example is my sister who was being asked to cut her natural locks before she was given a job yet had she put a relaxer on her hair there would have been no problem at all. On the issue of wearing earrings and piercing ears, note that those styles that you think are American are part of our (African) raw material that is stolen everyday by those you consider important, thus we have every right to use them because we are the producers. Or are you happy to constantly know that they are being mined at home and yet those who wear them are from afar. Tell me when someone wears a (local) chain or a diamond chain around the neck what makes one unAfrican?

At this point it appears that the issue has gone off on two tangents: the first one is the discussion of whether braiding hair or piercing ears is indeed Africa and second is the realisation that there is an unequal relationship between Africa and America. The conversation continues:

Geeque December 28, 2001

Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha! I guess you Sosa and your colleague Bongonian don't have a clue on what you are talking about. I am not sure you have the brains or that you are mentally retarded. The way you speak I am left wondering if you ever stepped into primary school. I asked you if your hair braiding and ear piercing is out of following Maasai and Kuria traditions. The truth is that many of my fellow youth do so after seeing them on TV. Both of you are like the emcees from Bongo who get on stage wearing winter coats and covering their faces with hoods. All that is aping what they see on Wu Tang and Mobb Deep videos. Now tell me given that heat in Bongo if wearing such coats is a local style or an imitation of foreign styles. Going back to our topic, I think you are those backward people who consider anything foreign to be precious. Tell me how many among you decided to start braiding your hair or piercing your ears to copy the Maasai?? The truth is none of you; you did so to copy foreigners such as Americans and Jamaicans. It is true all these styles started in Africa but African youth or those from Bongo did not decide to follow them until they saw Americans doing so. This makes me sad because as young people we are supposed to cherish our cultures. I usually come to Bongo on holiday and see many youth trying so hard to copy Americans. And it's not Bongo alone, I have travelled in Europe and Eastern Europe where socialism was embraced and the youth think copying America is trendy. I was born

in Bongo and I have lived in Bongo and America so don't try to convince me that you started wearing earrings to copy the Maasai. I know many fake "brotherman" in Bongo who pretend to be American and Jamaican and you two are some of them. And that is backwardness. I have attended many Bongo parties here in the States and I what I saw was laughable and I am sure you Sosa and Bongonian might have been part of those in attendance.

The expression of the unequal power between America and Africa seems to have taken a personalised trajectory as Geeque seeks to assert his Bongo identity despite his geographical (dis)location. The shift from an inquiry to an analysis of the mental capacity of those different views would easily drown the important emerging discussion of hip-hop and Westernization. Yet Geeque does present important issues as to the local rootedness of Bongo hip-hop. The term "Brotherman" is used in reference to those Tanzanians who adopt a foreign accent, mostly an African-American slang as a sign of having been "there" (becoming Westernized) and hence inhabiting a higher social status. Determined not to be put down Sosa interjects;

Sosa November 06, 2001

You Geeque I see you have nothing to say, where did the winter coat issue come from? And where did you hear that there are fake "brotherman" and those who are not? "Brotherman" have always been stupid, or are you the true "brotherman"? To braid one does not have to copy Maasai braiding, one could copy one's uncle or brother etc. And then, you fool, you think you are so learned, what exactly are you doing in America, working or going to school? If you were not swept in the storm that thinks America is the best place to live and go to school, how come you are not in Tanzania? For many of your type going to America has become trendy ... our officers who put on ties and suits in the Bongo heat, who are they copying?

There are emcees in Japan, Germany, Africa, etc. ... now you want to tell me they should stop rap because it's an American genre? Wake up you fool, everything has its origins and then others take it up. For instance, will you then say that Americans invented tattoos? How come the Japanese were putting on tattoos way before Afro-Americans were shipped to America, and how come the Makonde scar their faces while others have modified it into face tattoos and yet cannot see the difference between the two. So this is how it is madam, I just wanted to explain to you that everything has its origins and if others find it good they will adopt it as long as it does not interfere with their

beliefs and culture.

Bongonian, its like you had said before, these are the people who see a person in dreadlocks and immediately say the person smokes marijuana and copies Americans. And when I read Gqueen's posting I saw his contempt" (emphasis added).

Geeque

December 31, 2001

Sosa, a sack hotel, I go through your back without knocking or barrier or should I call you a camel since it seems they climb you from the back all the time. You continue to amuse me as it is clear you do not know what you are talking about....

Sosa

December 31, 2001

You fool. You pretend to be so animated and you did not say anything relevant to the topic. From your insults it is clear you are a faggot ...

Geeque

December 31, 2001

Hey faggot Sosa, I was looking at your profile and realized you are a drug dealer ...

Sosa

January 1, 2002

Geeque, my bad if I offended you in some way, lets just let the bygones be bygones and move on. See even I speak English sometimes and it is not being brotherman.

Geeque

January 2, 2002

Hey Sosa, I was not offended in any way, it was a way of stirring up the forum, and I am sorry for anything I said that may have offended you. Peace out my brother.

Interestingly enough, a discussion of hip-hop and Westernisation

rapidly moves from an inquiry about cultural practices, to a heated debate that ends up feminising the men involved in the discussion. This technique seems quite common in public debates where men put each other down by feminising them. While the discussion above clearly shows that the participants have given some thought to the cultural practices in question and their local and global manifestations, one wonders how such a genre meant to discuss hip-hop might be able to transcend such levels of individual putdown. In the last part of the discussion, when Sosa disagrees with Geeque's points he calls him madam and Gqueen, directly feminizing his identity and then calls him a faggot. In turn Geeque calls Sosa a faggot who he "*can go through his back without hindrance*" displaying his potential to feminise him socially. This kind of aggressive display towards other men is seen where "*men threaten to fira (actively penetrate) other men (sexually). The emphasis is not in the act itself but in the referential power of the one doing the penetration which aids in the construction of masculinity*" (Ntarangwi, 2003: 63). Men thus gain their power by symbolically asserting their masculinity in reference to sexuality. Issues of gender identity especially in the culturally sanctioned definitions of what constitutes proper femininity or masculinity are abundant in East Africa's popular music. Yet these issues constantly reflect the changing nature of these very definitions of gendered identity. As more and more Western cultural influences become manifested in East Africa through various media, local ideas and expectations of what is acceptable or unacceptable in those identities will continue to be debated and challenged. A different take on this perspective is evident if we explore how gendered identities are mobilised or reconfigured through and in hip-hop in East Africa.

Hip-hop and Gendered Identities

To understand how hip-hop expresses gendered identities and how it mobilises and shapes our understanding of gender, a selection of some song texts of popular songs by East African artistes both male and female will be discussed. Despite there being few female popular musicians in East Africa who hold dominant positions other than backup singers and dancers, the few that exist have produced important

critiques of how gender is constructed and expressed in many social forums (Ntarangwi, 2003). This section explores the various facets and meanings that gender as a culturally situated phenomenon takes in these songs. The artistes whose songs are analysed here are Wahu, Nonini, Lady JayDee, Deux Vultures, Chameleon and Redsan. Apart from Wahu whose featured song is predominantly sung in English, the other artistes present their lyrics in Kiswahili, Sheng (a blend of English and Kiswahili), or a street version of it, thus speaking to a very specific urban and youthful audience.

As Dan Teng'o notes, much of the hip-hop music heard in East Africa comprises songs with topics that are "*disturbingly trivial—alcohol, blind revelry and sexual promiscuity*" with "*few singers tackling constructive themes such as education, politics or social issues*" (Teng'o, 2003a). Nevertheless the immense popularity of these songs seems to point to an audience thirsty for a local style of hip-hop that is not laced with serious content. Thus one can probably see that hip-hop songs with serious social themes such as Kalamashaka's *Ni wakati* (it is time) did not generate as much popularity as the 'disturbingly trivial' songs such as *Ninanoki* (I go crazy) and *Teremuka* (Get down) by Nameless and Deux Vultures respectively.

One song that seems to have drawn quite a large following with its serious message is *Liar* by Wahu that discusses the problems of male-female relationships that are based on deception and lack of social maturity. Wahu has slowly been developing an identity of performing socially-engaged songs. Her other song *Sitishiki* (I am unshakable) engenders a feminist critique of social realities. In an interview with Dan Teng'o, Wahu says that "*the song is about an emerging breed of women with good education and good jobs ... who are breadwinners in their households, and head various national and international organisations*" (cited in Teng'o, 2003b). In her hit song *Liar*, Wahu castigates men who are dishonest in their relationships while also showing the naiveté that a woman could display when falling for a man based on his physical attributes. She sings:

*I was only eighteen young single and sexy
Having a party nothing serious was on my mind
That's when I met him cool handsome and lovely
Smile like an angel had a sparkle down in his eyes*

*He told me he loved me would do anything to have me
He told me he wanted to be the one who would make me happy
I said to my mama "Mama I think I found him"
And mama go tell me girl you must have been silly can't you see
He is a liar (his lovely eyes), a liar (his sexy smile)
He is a liar but I was hypnotized by his lovely eyes and sexy smile
Oh oh mama what am I gonna do?*

The song presents the classic story of 'girl-meet-boy and gets physically attracted to each other. Without much probing, takes all the promises to heart and later finds out that some caution and depth may have been necessary before going too far.' It is not clear from the text what the full extent of the mother's advice was when the girl announces she has "found him." Ignoring what the mother said and thought, the girl must have entered into an intimate relationship with the man she met and she ended up pregnant. Wahu then narrates the next part of the saga:

*I woke up one morning feeling a little bit funny
I went to the doctor, something wrong with me tell me oh
The doctor man tell me girl hakuna matata (no problem)
Oh sooner or later you will be a mama eh
I wrote down a letter sending it to my sweetie
You will be a papa in a nine or so so
A little bit later I hear a knock on the door eh
And there stood my sweetie and this is all he had to say to me
You are a liar (how can I be sure), a liar (I am responsible)
You are a liar (girl you must be wrong) ooh
You are a liar (girl you must be wrong) ooh*

This part of the song features Wahu singing the part of the girl and the part of the man in brackets is sung by a man. The man accuses the woman of lying that he is responsible for the pregnancy. She had earlier accused him of lying to her and enticing her with his lovely eyes and sexy smile. This dual-blaming seems to confirm Wahu's assertion about the song's intended message when she says "*it does not imply that only men are liars, anyone could be a liar in a relationship. It could be the man or the woman*" (Teng'o, 2003b). When the girl finally realises her predicament she shares her insights on this bitter but inevitable learning process:

Oh oh mama what am I gonna do, what am I gonna do now tell me

*He make me feel like a black Cinderella
A little later he tells me "later" till nobody know
And he up and he go and I did not know the fool had a wife at home
If you see him before I do just tell him he is a liar*

Stories abound of young women who often find themselves in similar situations. Having gone through college in the period when most student in public universities continue to find it hard to juggle academic requirements with meagre financial resources, Wahu is probably warning many young female college students who might fall prey to dishonest men out to misuse them.¹⁷⁵ *Liar* is thus a song that locates itself as an agent for the negotiation of social and sexual relations in the context of Western tenets of romantic love that often tends to emphasise individual choice based on physical attributes as well as self-stated commitments and avoids any parental interventions in the decision-making process.

Unlike Wahu, Chameleon—the Ugandan hip-hop star that made his career in Kenya—seems to be turning his wrath onto the woman who even after having had eight children with him leaves her man because she was still physically attractive. In the song entitled *Mama mia*, Chameleon states:

*We have had eight children together
Now you leave me saying you are tired and that I am poor
Now you discard me, where do I go, what do I do?
The kids are crying at home, but that is life
You seek pleasure first, ignoring me Njoki
Why do you leave, leaving me with eight children?
They are still crying at home Njoki, why do you leave me?
It is because you have a bottle-shaped figure (attractive)*

Chameleon who lived in Nairobi for a while before returning home to Kampala, learned some of the local slang and his character in the song is Njoki (a common Kikuyu name for a woman). She leaves the man because she is still attractive and also because the man is poor.

¹⁷⁵ In January 2004 *The Daily Nation* ran stories of university female students who were engaging in commercial sex to sustain themselves through school while others turned to hawking to raise funds to finance their college education. Such vulnerable youth will quickly fall prey to men with a disposable income who lure them with material things for their sexual pleasure and later abandon them.

The theme of physical attributes and material possessions seems to run through most songs with messages of male-female relationships in East Africa (cf. Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2002; Ntarangwi, 2003). The theme of poverty is further explored in this song when Chameleon says:

*I am your lover don't leave me claiming that I am poor
Beware that those with Mercedes-Benz cars have the money
Yet they have no love and that is the truth
Chameleon is the true lover don't leave me claiming that I am poor*

*Beware that those with BMW cars have money and yet no love
The world is full of surprises, even men cry
I constantly look for money to buy her oil
Only to find that one day she will change
Why have you changed and left me Mama mia?*

Two issues that are unusual in the public construction of masculine identity in much of East Africa are addressed here by Chameleon. First, the scenario where a man admits publicly he is crying and wants his wife back. Part of masculine identity for many East African males is the idea that a public display of emotion such as crying is unwelcome. Indeed, there are few cases, at least in public discourse, of men who admit crying because of being abandoned by a woman. Second, rare are cases of women who leave their husbands with eight children. It is mostly men who leave women with children and no child support. In this case, therefore, Chameleon is portraying a man as the victim of domestic disdain and the woman as the villain. It creates a good contrast for reading Wahu's song above where the woman was attracted to a man who later abandoned her when she became pregnant.

Lady JayDee became famous in East Africa for her song entitled *Wanaume kama mabinti* (men who are like women) in which she castigates men who have literally become feminized by their public activities. She sings in her refrain:

*You eat, drink, and get clothed day in day out
You like to get things for free and you don't care
You fit in every side as days go by
You are full of gossip, men who have become like women*

These men seem unabashed by the fact that they are not economically

independent but are constantly supported economically. They also display traits often associated with women, such as gossip. Lady JayDee is quick to note that she does not refer to all men but to those who act like women:

*When I say men I do not mean all of them
But those with traits similar to those of women
You will see them in their girlfriends' cars
Smiling and laughing you would think they are something
They like to soothe older women
They have no genuine love they are constantly thinking money
If I say they sell themselves I will not be wrong
What is the difference between them and prostitutes?*

This part of Lady JayDee's song is contrasts Chameleon's song that castigates Njoki for chasing after wealthy men (who own Mercedes-Benz and BMW cars) who have no genuine love. Lady JayDee similarly castigates men who go after older women for their money and thus displaying no genuine love and still want to be supported by their girlfriends. These men seem to have no problem being supported at all levels. As Lady JayDee shows:

*If you meet them in beer halls, they are the 'know-it-all' type
Yet they will not contribute a cent towards paying the bill
When it's their turn (to buy) they go to the toilet
They are tricky and cunning
They like to entertain their friends' girlfriends
My friends please bring on some dresses we clothe them
Bring headscarves we tie on them plus mini-skirts to lend these men*

The ultimate step is to physically turn these 'parasitic' men into women by dressing them up in women's clothing. Lady JayDee seems to question these men's masculinity as they seem to engage in female behaviour. She must have a dichotomized view of gender where men have specific identities that clearly separate them from those of women and any conflation of such distinct roles is unwelcome. Indeed, as she states at the end of the song:

*Where have you seen a man for whom beer is always bought?
Since when did a whole (real) man braid his hair?*

Thus the same identities propagated by hip-hop such as hair braiding by men that brought about such a heated debate between Geeque, Sosa and Bongonian seem to take on a different trajectory in Lady JayDee's song. Her expectations of a 'real' man is one who supports himself economically and avoids 'female' practices such as braiding hair.

In the next three examples, women are depicted in the stereotypical manner where their beauty is central in their relations with men. In his song *Manzi wa Nairobi* (Nairobi girl) Nonini says:

*Nairobi girl get up and dance
Scream, scream, scream till we hear you here in Africa
In the entire world no other girl matches the one from Nairobi
She adorns herself well and her clothes are spotless
You will always see her walking in town with a swagger
If you go past her you will definitely turn around
In your mind you will be thinking 'how will she open those buttons'?
That pair of jeans is so tight, it tightens up till there
Look at the way I am trembling as if I have drunk Chang'aa (illicit liquor)
Because the things I saw last night will amaze you ...
Look at that one, oh my God!
If I was judge, the Miss Universe pageant would be easy
All Nairobi girls would win easily*

While this song can be interpreted as representing a male gaze on a female body, it is also a commentary on the mode of dress that often separates people of different generations—women born during and immediately after colonial period would find short or tight dresses unacceptable to be worn in public while that seems acceptable among the generation born in the 1970s. Through Westernisation, hip-hop culture has meant a style of dressing where young men and women dress up like hip-hop stars seen on MTV and Channel O—popular television programmes aired through the growing private and public television stations in East Africa. Indeed, the internationalisation of this identity leads Nonini to declare that if he were judge, Nairobi girls would be crowned Miss Universe all the time. Thus, while indicating a desire to localise international beauty pageant standards by involving a local judge (Nonini), the beauty terrain itself is global (technically Western). This expansion of beauty and identity beyond the local arena seems to reveal a seemingly pan-African consciousness. For instance, in Wahu's song *Liar* as well as Deux Vultures' song *Mona Lisa*, there

is mention of a Black Cinderella and an African Queen respectively; Nonini's song talks of a possible Miss Universe title for the Nairobi girl. All these inferences show a regional or global consciousness where life and identities imagined and mobilised through hip-hop music in East Africa draw on both the local and global (Remes, 1999). The artistes and their audience members are not confined to a local realm of imagined existence but rather, are open to the various Western forms of identities mobilised through hip-hop.

The Kenyan group Deux Vultures, who grew up in Tanzania, like Chameleon, moved to Nairobi to try and jumpstart their music career and their hit songs *Mona Lisa*, *Teremuka* and *Heppi* seem to point to a successful start. Their song *Mona Lisa*, similar to Nonini's *Manzi wa Nairobi* dwells on the physical beauty of an urban woman. While the song is provocatively entitled *Mona Lisa* to show a heightened global consciousness, it is situated within local sensibilities of beauty. The song is mostly rendered in Sheng but uses some Spanish and French to complete the cosmopolitanism of this hip-hop group. The song introduces this extraordinary woman:

*Its dawn and I am awake
I pass through Mama Ngina¹⁷⁶
I hear coo coo doo doo
Take this, after a short while I see a pretty girl
Expensive kinda looking you would think she just landed
Let me tell you
She was dressed up in a black stretcher
A blue silky top and a pair of black sketchers
An African queen, a rare kinda species none of you has ever seen*

This *Mona Lisa* girl is really an extra ordinary person with a cosmopolitan identity that requires sophisticated reference points for identity. *Mona Lisa* in its original context refers to a painting by Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci which was started in 1503 and finished three or four years later depicting a portrait of woman of European descent wearing an introspective expression and smiling slightly. The original painting hangs in the Louvre Museum in Paris since the mid-1500s when the artist visited France. It is probably the most famous portrait in art history and has been reproduced and reshaped to fit many different contexts and styles. The current rendition of *Mona Lisa* in the Deux Vultures song is yet another addition to this myriad process of

¹⁷⁶ Street named after Jomo Kenyatta's wife.

localising or reproducing Mona Lisa to fit specifically desired images and identities. It is instructive that the song presents Mona Lisa as an African Queen who is famous for her ability to wiggle her body (unlike the original Mona Lisa who is only depicted from chest upwards and shows little emotional expression). In the refrain Deux Vultures say:

*Look at the way Mona Lisa wiggles
I am left in awe
Many ask me what I did to get her*

It appears that to get Mona Lisa would be such a prized accomplishment that to make sure she does not go away she is promised:

*Now it's the Vultures you should know you will not suffer
I will not hit you
I have also sworn it's only you I want
I don't want the others, there are a lot of diseases around
Let me give you pleasure, Kenyan girl*

The subtle message being expressed here is that of a 'modern' male who will not hit his girlfriend and who will only have one partner. These two issues are important in the discussion of male-female relationships in East Africa where numerous women become victims of physical abuse at the hands of people close to them and also where infidelity is rampant. The latter part of the song reassures the girl that she need not worry about anything, not even her current lover, because once she is with this new man she will discover that she need not go elsewhere. It is one of those common features of masculinity where each man seeks to outdo his competitor by laying claim to sexual prowess. It is instructive to note that when men seek to shore up their masculine identity in competition with other men, they may usually do one of two things—feminise the other man by symbolically threatening to sexually subdue them, or lay claim to their unparalleled virility.

This song while openly making reference to uninhibited sexual encounters also expresses a desire for a single partner because “*there are a lot of diseases*” around. Composed and produced at a time when HIV/AIDS is a major threat to the entire East African population, this song makes for an important social message albeit in the midst of an expression of uninhibited sexual promiscuity. The message of

the musician is that sexual promiscuity is a reality, but one needs to be cautious about it, and remain faithful to one partner.¹⁷⁷

In his song entitled Julie, Redsan uses the common theme of male-female relationships explored in other songs analysed here not to show any depth of content, but to draw on a topic that would excite the target audience. Thus Redsan sings:

*In your eyes I saw my way, I was sure I would get there
Now I feel a mile away, but I know I will get there
So much reasons and ways, why she still makes my day
When you show me the feelings, girl you show me the meanings
When you hurt me mama mammy, show me who will be my baby
Show me who will take care of me, show me who to call darling
Oh Julie my lover why do you torture me
If your father does not like dreadlocks what do I do
I will shave off the dreadlocks
I will buy a BMW and then we will go to the Carnivore¹⁷⁸
Please have mercy on me, I plead don't torture me
I will take you to my father, he will give us wealth then we will get married*

As Teng'o (2003a) notes about many of these songs, they lack substance and often “*have predictable rhyme schemes.*” In Redsan’s song above, the artiste seems more interested in rhyme than in the substantive innovations. Yet this simplicity may be the reason the song became a big hit when it was recorded with many others on Ogopa DJ’s first full-length CD collection of East African popular music. The lyrics may lack depth but they are catchy and many fans sing along with Redsan at live performances or in discotheques.

Conclusions

The rise of hip-hop in East Africa points to a new mode of communication and expression for the youth who comprise the

¹⁷⁷ Numerous hip-hop groups have responded to the scourge of HIV/Aids with specific messages warning people especially the youth on the realities of the disease. Some examples include Res ‘Q’ Ranjaz of Nigeria, Devious of South Africa who call their music hiphop and Tanzania’s WAGOSI wa Kaya whose song Umeme na Maji Umeshakuwa Kero (Electricity and Water are Now Calamities) was used in the 2002 national AIDS awareness campaign in Dar es Salaam. For more examples see www.africanhiphop.com

¹⁷⁸ Restaurant in Nairobi, with a large popular discotheque.

majority of East Africa's population. Their ability to blend foreign cultural expressions with locally situated lyrics in a vernacular specific to their lives points not necessarily to a Westernised group but a reflection of East African cultural realities shaped by contact, conquest and redefinition.

As the landscape of politics and economics continues to change to include individuals from different social, ethnic and age backgrounds, hip-hop will continue to play an important role in the contemporary life of East Africans. Indeed as many men and women pursue this mode of expression, hip-hop will be a useful medium to mobilise the youth culturally and socially. Already, many hip-hop groups have been involved in social politics, and other cultural changes. As noted by the Dutch NGO Madunia in reference to hip-hop in Tanzania,

*Since many lyrics are rapped in local languages, the importance of rap music as an alternative medium besides newspapers, radio, and television increases. Rap has become a medium with roots in oral tradition of Africa. Intervention concerning problems like Aids, unemployment, violence, and drug abuse starts with the youth. However, communication about these problems will have to go through media that is suitable for young people.*¹⁷⁹

This chapter shows that none of the artistes whose work is analysed here has any distinct Kenyan, Ugandan or Tanzanian identity. By virtue of the language and content of their music, it is hard to specifically identify them by their music. Indeed, it may come as a surprise to many Kenyans that Deux Vultures were born in Tanzania or that Chameleon is Ugandan.¹⁸⁰ Many Kenyans thought the upcoming hip-hop singer Prince Adio from Mombasa is a Tanzanian possibly because of his mastery of Kiswahili which many Kenyans are not identified with.¹⁸¹ This is a true reflection of the cosmopolitan nature of the genre they use as well as the artistes themselves. In discussing the emergent cosmopolitan worldview speeded up by the process of globalisation, German scholar Ulrich Beck states that,

The imagining of possible lives can no longer be conceived as national or ethnic

¹⁷⁹ www.madunia.nl

¹⁸⁰ See special report in *The Daily Nation* entitled 'New music exiles settle in Nairobi' posted on www.nationmedia/dailynation, 17 March 2004 for a discussion of this cosmopolitan nature of East African musicians.

¹⁸¹ See Njoki Karuoya's article entitled 'Turning a true story into a winning song' in the Saturday Magazine of *The Daily Nation* of 21 February 2004.

or as corresponding to the polarity of rich and poor; it can only be understood as taking place within world society. What people dream, how they would like to be, their everyday utopias of happiness--these are no longer tied to a particular geographical area and its cultural identities (2000: 65–66).

Hip-hop lyrics are often composed to reflect the cosmopolitan identity of the musicians and their fans. They make direct reference to the lives of urbanised East African youth by using an idiom that mobilises images, words and references specific to their lived and imagined realities. Unlike in older generations where music performed in public was composed in a language palatable to all audiences, the contemporary Western-media-influenced youth are not shy to use direct language in addressing issues bordering on obscenity. Thus themes of ribald sexuality and social issues regarding unemployment, teenage pregnancies and neo-colonialism often find expression in the same context.

This is the expansive and accommodative creativity that has accompanied African music for centuries and is now being reflected in hip-hop from across different geographical locations.

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Thematising Election Politics in Swahili Epic: the case of Mahmoud Abdulkadir

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The close relationship between African orature, politics and the traditional state has been acknowledged by several writers. According to Finnegan (1970: 82), the patronage of poets in centralised political systems in the past led to poetry of profound significance as a means of political propaganda, pressure or communication.

Masizi Kunene in South Africa has observed that during the period of Shaka, “*Zulu literature changed to become a powerful vehicle of social and political ideas. Poets and singers became central democratic agents to reaffirm the approval or disapproval of the whole nation.*”¹⁸²

This is a reality vindicated by this case study. This paper examines how politics is thematised in the epic and how the nature of the epic as an expressional mode allows the composer to delve deeply and widely in his topic.

The *Utenzi* (epic) category is characterised by four lines, the first three having similar end rhymes. The end rhyme of the fourth line which is normally referred to as ‘*bahari*’ is similar in all the stanzas. The *utenzi* form is usually employed handling themes that call for long, exhaustive and protracted narration.

The epic under discussion is not yet published. Indeed, there is a lot of Swahili literature that has been collected but has not yet been published. An even larger amount remains un-researched and known to few people. Little is known about the composer apart from being an

¹⁸² Mazisi Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great*. London: Heinemann, 1979; p. xxv of the Introduction.

Islamic scholar from Lamu. Nevertheless, the area is known as a hodge-podge of poetry, according to Kyallo Wamitila,

*One of the most crucial facts relating to the literary contexts of classical poetry is that it was composed mainly in the northern Kiswahili dialects, especially Kiamu and Kipate. Kiamu is actually considered as having been the standard dialect of scholarship, a model to which all the poets had to aspire. Amu poetry is characterized by a powerful aesthetic excellence.*¹⁸³

The epic was composed in 2002 as a tool of civic and political mobilisation just before the end year General Elections. The main gist was to enlighten the ordinary *mwanaanchi*,¹⁸⁴ on the importance of voting—voting wisely.

The discussion on this epic is on the basic assumption that there is an intricate connection between an aesthetic object or text and society. It would therefore be necessary to situate the text within a generic context be it social, political, economic or cultural. This context is crucial in deciphering the meaning as well as, it is assumed, the symbolism and significance pervading the text. In the words of the New Historicists, there is a textualizing of historical fact.

The *utenzi* has 300 stanzas in total. In the last stanza the composer says:

*Ina lake ni mwangaza
Asaa ukashunduzwa
Kwenye chasi yasaikiza
Nasi ndiye kuonyea*

It's named light
As maybe it will illuminate
In the era's darkness
For us to see the way

The poet uses the metaphor of 'light' in reference to his poetical composition. His significance is based on the archetypal symbolism of light. In his poem he wants to educate the Swahili, Coastal people and even those who are not in these categories and Kenyans in general. We learn of this in the first three stanzas where he says:-

*Kunasihi waswahili
Na wapwani asiliya*

to counsel Swahilis
and natural Coastals
(stanza 1)

Nao wasokuwa hawa

and even those who do not fall here
(stanza 2)

¹⁸³ Kyalo W. Wamitila, *Archetypal Criticism of Kiswahili Poetry*, Bayreuth African Studies 57 2001; p. 43.

¹⁸⁴ An ordinary citizen.

The immediate coastal context is therefore microcosmic (representative of the wider Kenyan context). Mahmoud wanted to educate the people by giving them political enlightenment and showing them the importance of exercising one's civic rights of voting.

*Madhumuni yangu khasa
Kwandika hizi kurasa
Ni mwangaza wa siyasa
Shabaha nilolengeya*

My real objective
To compose
Is political enlightenment
That is my aim
(stanza 5)

In order to achieve his stated goal, the poet intends to dwell on seven basic issues. However, more will arise in the course of the narration.

1. The meaning of elections and its objectives
(stanza 9)
2. The role of elections according to the constitution
(stanza 10)
3. The responsibility of the electorate during election
(stanza 11)
4. The responsibility of the person we elect
(stanza 12)
5. The power bestowed upon elected person be it the President, Member of Parliament or local Councillor
(stanza 13)
6. What one needs to think about before voting
(stanza 14)
7. What we expect to benefit from the person we elect
(stanza 15)

The meaning of the word election is elaborated in stanzas 17–23 as the foundation of democracy. During elections, the people are given a chance to decide for themselves. Elections makes administration work easy as not all people can come together to make decisions for themselves. Their chosen leader makes decisions on their behalf. The poet goes on to say that it is a way of taking the administration to the people. It gives them the mandate to decide how they want their affairs to be run. True democracy starts with the people and they, therefore, should not remain as shadows to merely follow what has already been

decided. If this is achieved, the people's affairs will progress and the country will develop for the good of everyone.

The poet shows how the failure to exercise their democratic right bedevils citizenry in third world countries. The poet opines that although the people say they have elected strong leaders to lead them, these 'leaders' do not act with decorum during the campaigns. Most resort to force to coerce the people or cajole them by buying their way into power. Seats earned through bribery means that these leaders do not rightly deserve their seats.

From stanza 31, the poet enumerates the attributes of a good/true leader. In his view, a true leader is one who comes from the grassroots, whom the people chose and one who does not bribe his way to victory. He shows how leadership is not easy and how many cannot make it even though they may crave it. A person who has used his money during elections will not bother himself¹⁸⁵ in serving the people. He admits that one who intends to work for the betterment of his people would not bribe unless he had a hidden agenda.

The poet uses figurative tropes-metaphor and similes to describe politicians who want to use money during election campaigns.

*Kitowa za mfukoni
Ni chambo hiko metiya*

If he removes from his pocket
That is a bait he is using
(stanza 37)

*Huwa metiya chambo
Au ni kama ulimbo*

That is a bait
Or it is like a trap
(stanza 38)

A politician who does this does not care and does not mind even if the whole population suffers. According to the scribe, such a politician is not a patriot but an outsider. Even though he pretends, it is a front he puts on. The poet continues:

*Hawi nao uzalendo
Huwa kama mtu kando
Angaitiya zishindo
Ni paziya hutumiya*

He is not a patriotic
He is like an outsider
Even though he pretends
This is a camouflage
(stanza 40)

The poet goes on to say that this is the worst form of oppression; cheating the people by pretending that one is fighting to serve the weak.

¹⁸⁵ I have used male only as Lamu has not hitherto had any female MPs.

He admits that this is a big problem as normally those who secure political seats are the rich and the ones who deserve to win do not succeed. The composer lays the blame on the people themselves—during the election, they are hoodwinked with money by the wily politicians. The money they get does not satisfy their thirst. In the poem, thirst is a dominant symbol of perpetual want.

*Hayawesi wapewao
Mwako wao husalia*

To those who are given money
It does not satisfy their thirst remains
(stanza 44)

It is instructive to note that ‘*mwako*’ besides meaning thirst, also means heat, imbuing it with a poignant imagery.

The poet compares the money to the votes and prestige the seat holder gets and says the money is too little. This acts as an impediment on the electorate who cannot exert pressure on the leader. People will not be able to demand for their rights and agitate for services as he will tell them that he spent thousands to win the seat. He will not bother himself with doing anything for his constituents.

The composer has also highlighted the issue of over-dependency on the Members of Parliament. The Swahili have, according to the poet, a misguided notion on the role of an MP. They expect and their personal needs to be fulfilled. He enumerates these from stanza 53–56 and stanzas 161–169. The poet shows that people ask the Member of Parliament to :

Pay for thatching their roofs (stanzas 53, 168)

Money to buy a plot or farm (stanza 53)

Pay house rent (stanza 53)

Pay hospital bills (stanzas 54, 169)

Pay school fees (stanzas 54, 167)

Pay for food and clothing (stanza 16)

Buy medicines for his constituents (stanza 161)

Assist in releasing a thief or a person arrested for drug abuse (stanzas 163,164,165)

(this is corruption as the MP uses his influence to break the law)

Help with the people's weddings (stanza 166)

Assist in obtaining certain documents from the Government like passports (stanza 166)

The politician accomplishes all the stated needs, thus when elected he is no longer feels obliged to do anything for his constituents, and does not serve the citizens. This may however be reflective of the dismal state of civic education among the electorate.

From stanza 57, the poet discusses the role of a Member of Parliament. He is the voice of the people and one who is supposed to defend them. He does not speak on his behalf but on behalf of the people who voted him in and he must remember the role for which he was elected. He has to accept what the people want even if he sometimes does not fulfill his needs. He has to put the people first. Therefore, if he has the correct qualities, he will be able to work for the good of the citizens. The poet poses a rhetoric question which we should ask and not fool ourselves. If a person spends his money will he really serve us? The scribe poses this question because the voting pattern in Lamu has always been dictated by the financial fiat of the campaigners.

The composer notes that if the people are to benefit, they must take a stand. He urges people to be firm and not think of what they might gain as individuals. A pervasive feature of the epic is repetition which indicates the oral nature of the composition.

The poet emphasises that the people must understand that elections are very important hence voting properly completes one's humanity. They have the opportunity to decide for themselves the type of leaders they want. Elections can be used to vote out bad leadership. He advises that people should not turn the voting card into a business venture, selling to the highest bidder. One should not sell one's voter's card and should not agree to be made a fool of by accepting money.

The composer shows how all the Members of Parliament, Councillors and even the President need the citizens who elect them. He uses a metaphor comparing the people to a ladder which the Members of Parliament, Councillors and President use to ascend to their positions. He shows that if the people refuse to elect them even, the President will not get a chance. This indicates that the right to vote, granted by the country's constitution, is very strong.

The epic then goes on to show the strength of elections. It is a way in which the citizens make up a country and the role of the President is only to be the head of state. All the Members of Parliament, Councillors and the President need the people in order to get their positions. It is therefore the electorate's responsibility to choose effective leaders, not those that will be dormant. The poet stresses this saying:

*Tukiteuwa wazembe
Huifuma sisi chembe
Haya nilazima twambe
Kuoneshana ya ndiya*

If we choose ineffective people
We are shooting ourselves
We must say this
To guide one another

The administration at the district level is very important as they several roles to play. The district should ensure that services offered are accessible to all citizens. This includes ensuring that law and order is maintained in the towns, and consistent standards of cleanliness are maintained. The mushrooming of make-shift kiosks and buildings constructed without authority are some of the weaknesses of the councils. Most pavements in the towns have been appropriated for other uses. There have also been cases of buildings collapsing and injuring citizens.

The land issue has also been addressed. Here the poet thematises a problematic issue in Kenyan society. Land is allocated without proper justification and the councils are to blame. The composer seems to be well acquainted with the structure of the administration—he shows that the council is made up of Councillors with a chairman, clerk and secretaries. He poses a hypophorical question¹⁸⁶ as to who took the Councillors to the council. He answers himself that the Councillors did not descend from the skies but were elected. Thus the people are involved and share in committing mistakes. They do not choose wisely during elections.

The parameters the people use are misguided as they do not take this issue seriously. He goes on to show the outright ineffective parameters.

1. They do not look at the person but where he comes from,
looking at his family background
(stanza 98, 216)

¹⁸⁶ A form of a rhetorical question, which is answered soon after.

2. What the politician will give them
(stanza 98)
3. They do not look at his educational background or his
principals
(stanza 99)
4. They do not gauge his love for the country or his actions
nor do they look at his past behaviour
(stanza 100)
5. They do not think of who will take care of them
(stanza 101)
6. All of them are just blind followers and they just follow
the group without evaluating
(stanza 102)
7. Some of them look at the celebrations during elections and
do not look at anything else when the trumpet blows
(stanza 103)

They do not use their intelligence to think of their long-term benefits. This plunges them into perpetual regret.

The original aim of elections is to elect good leaders who are accepted by the people. These are non-fraudulent leaders, elected willingly after the people have considered them and deemed them worthy to serve. The poet then shows the qualities of a good leader (stanza 107–115).

It is one who fulfills the needs of his people. It is one who does not accept his people to be oppressed and stands firm in pursuit of success. It is one who does not accept bribery and would rather die than regress. It is one who is selfless and not greedy. He shows that one who does not have these qualities cannot be a leader. The poet warns about the consequences of electing the wrong leader.

After showing the qualities of the leaders, he switches to the role of the Member of Parliament when he goes to Parliament. This is an important forum. It is the Parliament which mandates MPs to add new laws, to amend or to repeal them.

They are the ones who accept the budget and if they oppose, it will not be passed even if the Finance Minister advocates for it. The MPs plan taxes which are the backbone of a country's internal revenue. Their decisions are the root and basis of success or failure. Their voices

represent the millions who voted for them. It is in Parliament that the game of politics is played for the success or failure of the country. There is also time allocated in Parliament for questions from different sections to be asked. This session is very important and it is the place to fight for rights and voice one's opinion without being victimized. In this sense, the epic becomes a powerful tool of civic education enumerating the roles of Parliament.

In Parliament, there are mechanisms to shelter and there is freedom to oppose what is not right. The poet ridicules some of the MPs who do not speak at all except to laugh and clap. They have nothing to say and even easily accept issues that which will cause havoc. In this way, they lose their right to debate unacceptable issues. The debate was introduced so that rules are not made without the approval of the public.

Although it is in Parliament that laws are made, the composer admits that citizens are still shackled by colonial laws, which are still in use. According to the poet, these laws are alien. They were made in European countries, countries that are different in behavioural patterns, and do not address local needs. The poet goes on to say that there are many things preferred by citizens while are omitted from these laws. Many of the documents brought forward for debate are irrelevant to local needs and merely cause problems.

The people's representatives are ignorant and do not know how to articulate issues and thus they waste their opportunities. This is the aim of the poet composing the epic—he hopes to shed some light on what he has said and to educate the people. The epic shows the abject state of civic education in Kenya.

The poet then stresses what should be done to change this situation. The people must be educated to understand that the money offer to them cannot be compared to the value of their votes. They must come up with new ways to ensure that their rights are protected and needs fulfilled. They must elect young educated people with the drive to work, and should not accept low quality leaders. If they elect such leaders things will not change and it will just be a pipe-dream.

The people should look for leaders who are bold and firm; leaders who have the people's interest at heart and will not accept their oppression.

They should look for patriots and leaders from their locality, who cannot be swayed into corruption. He notes that local and scrupulous patriots exist, and should be sought for leadership. They should avoid fighting each other and unite.

The poet shows what an MP is supposed to do and what he should not do. The people should educate one another about the rightful role of a Member of Parliament. An MP's job is to bring development to his constituents and make sure the Government provides basic social amenities like education, health and economic development.

The poet wants the MP to be responsible and ensure development and prosperity of his district. He should be firm and guarantee that local resources do not go to waste. The epic is a critique of a pervasive culture of economic plunder and self-aggrandizement by the political elite in several African countries. Accepting of bribes or monetary inducements constitute a case of political disenfranchisement.

The composer wanted to enlighten the people to vote wisely. He wants to teach the politicians a lesson so that those who have wealth do not toy with the Swahili people, as they have woken up and will only vote for he who is ready to work for them. The poet contextualizes the poem in the multiparty era. He gives an example of an incident in Kipipiri¹⁸⁷, which epitomised the culture of using money as bait. He uses a powerful simile in stanza 205 to show this. He says:

*Tukumbuke Kipipiri
Yalikwenda mibepari
Kama mai ya bahari
Mapesa walotumiya*

Let's remember Kipipiri
Capitalists went there
Like the sea water
The money they used

He also uses sarcasm as instead of saying '*mabepari*' capitalists he uses the word '*mibepari*' infusing the word with an augmentative, as well as a derogative sense.

From stanza 223, the poet elaborates the specific role of the President. We are the people who elected him. The powers that he wields come from the people's votes. Some of the President's roles enumerated are

¹⁸⁷ A constituency in Central Province where a by-election was held and the ruling party at that time (KANU) sent a strong delegation of its top brass with a lot of money and promises. They lost the elections.

that he constitutes the cabinet and has the power to sign bills into laws or veto them. Thus the poet shows how the ballot has a very important role. It is not a mere paper but rather one's opportunity to choose how to be governed and by whom, be it the President, Member of Parliament or Councillor.

The qualities of a good leader are a pervasive leitmotif in the whole epic. This theme is reiterated from stanzas 245–252. He tells the people who have lost their voting cards to seek replacements. People should not travel to other towns to register as voters. He warns that most problems they face are a result of misusing the ballot during elections.

People should work hard and move forward. There is need to enlighten one another and show each other what is right. The time has come for all generations, particularly the young, to value their votes. Those that understand politics, are people and are keen to serve the people should be elected.

Stanzas 270–298 are added to discuss taxes and point out the importance of respecting them. The Government has to levy taxes on its people so that it can run the country, thus paying tax is mandatory. If people do not pay taxes, from where will the country's funding come? He poses a rhetorical question which is also symbolic—'which well will it get wealth from?' The well is a symbol that signifies the means of getting wealth. Therefore, people have to pay taxes so that the Government can continue providing services. If the Government does not meet its obligation of providing services, the people are entitled to refuse to pay taxes. Security, education, electricity and water are the people's right. Good roads, neighbourhoods and doctors are also services which the country should provide. There should be plenty of food so that one can eat whatever one wants and it should be available to all, rich and poor. The poet uses a powerful symbol and asks that if the taxes become fleas why should people pay?

The poet examines how deep the culture of corruption is embedded in the society. The lowest social levels, to the highest, are corrupt. He says:

Hata aliyo tarishi
Nawe haishughulishi
Ikiwa humrambishi

Even one who is a messenger
Will not do anything
If you don't give him something

Another issue which the poet wants to stress is education. He shows that this is an important pillar for fulfilling their needs. Without education the people's suffering will not end and they will forever lag behind. Education is a good investment and savings. He uses a proverb to show its importance in stanza 294.

Ni akiba haiozi

It is a saving it does not rot

The composer considers education as more important than wealth. He urges fellow Swahilis to educate others. This is a sensitive issue among the coastal people as they have continued to lag behind. The education infrastructure is not well developed.

The epic under discussion is a “*manifestation of space where power relations are made visible*.”¹⁸⁸ The power here works in the Foucaultian sense through discourses, which like ideology, makes the electorate easily comply with the discourse of the wily politicians.

The composer wants his epic to be a symbol of light and hope for his people. He wants them to come out of the darkness as this is the right time. Having been composed in the era of multiparty politics, the message in the epic is very apt. The time has come to value these seats and not sell their rights.

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¹⁸⁸ John Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, London: Macmillan 1998; p. 6.

Formation of a Popular Music: Hip-hop in Tanzania

Emphasis on its Social and Political Engagement

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*Nimepania kuelimisha jamii ya Tanzania, nimepania hatutaki viongozi wanaosinzia, nimepania Bwana, Mtanzania bwana [...] Watanzania hivi ni wapi tunaelekea ? Au ukoloni unataka kujirudia [...] Hii kazi yangu bwana kurekebisha, nikinyamaza Tanzania itakwisha tu [...]*¹⁸⁹

Extract from *Nimepania*, by the group Joni Woka and Ras Lion (2002)

Introduction

This paper on Tanzanian hip-hop begins in a remote village in the Udzungwa Mountains.¹⁹⁰ It all begins in a kiosk, where the owner listened to a type of music that quickly piqued my interest. It was neither because of its rhythm which to my ears had no relation whatsoever with the African musical tradition, nor for its content sung in Kiswahili and which at the beginning of the field work seemed slightly familiar. The reason for my astonishment was because of the zeal with which this young trader played the cassette, from morning to evening on his

¹⁸⁹ Translation by Peter Mangesho (2003, p. 145–146): “I am determined to educate the Tanzanian society, I am determined. We don’t want leaders who doze, I am determined so as a Tanzanian [...] Tanzanians where are we heading? Or colonialism wants to come back? [...] it is our duty job to correct each another. If I keep quiet Tanzania will be finished [...]”

¹⁹⁰ This village, called Udekwa, is located in Iringa region, in a relatively isolated mountainous area.

pecially charged battery-powered hi-fi system, during his movement in one of the first towns with electricity in the district.

Several weeks later, some friends translated the words of one of the songs that was my morning wake-up call in this village. To my surprise, I discovered that the songs had a political and civic message in an original setting, worthy of a theatre comedy. The group, Joni Woka and Ras Lion, sing songs reputed to be “*kali sana*”—highly critical of the powers that be. One of the singers had a ‘drunk’ voice, referred to in Tanzania as *sauti ya kilevi*. Without inhibition, he clearly expressed his revulsion for the dysfunctions of his country.

During my travels in the rural and urban areas in 2003 and the beginning of 2004, I closely studied the peculiarities of hip-hop in Tanzania. This brief immersion of culture in the music world of *kizazi kipya*¹⁹¹ helped me discover its deep involvement in the socio-cultural and political composition of the country.

The paper will show how hip-hop became a cog on both the wheel of aspirations and crises that society experiences, and an instrument of popular political and social mobilisation. Initially, the paper will address the conditions leading to the composition of this movement and its progressive recognition. It will then underline the parallels between the trifling participation of the society in political life, and the new space for freedom that the hip-hop artistes have created in the country. The political and educative role played by several hip-hop artistes in Tanzania will be explored. As breakers of silence in the political and social spheres, these artistes play an unrivalled role in the Tanzanian society. This paper will study this role in view of contemporary social and political realities.

Hip-hop: a definition

There is no doubt that the impetus for this movement came from the Black and Hispanic residential areas of Queens, Brooklyn and especially the Bronx (Ferrari, 2003). However, the subject of the genesis of this movement regularly resurfaces in the artistic and research world that looks into its history. What are the musical influences contributing

¹⁹¹ This is an expression used for ‘the new generation’.

to this original culture?

While some writers refer to the 1920s during which the first blues album by an afro-American was recorded, some are convinced that rap has African origins.¹⁹² Its numerous musical traditions have always favoured musical forms relating narration to song, and diction to melody. Music was “*nothing more than an ornament, an embellishment of speech.*”¹⁹³

In his article ‘*La préhistoire du rap*’¹⁹⁴, Arnaud points out the stream of contemporary musical genres which were as much a result of blues as of gospel and jazz. These genres explored the new sounds and ways of singing well before the first hip-hop groups were formed. All these avant-garde styles, such as the talking blues boosted modes of artistic expression closely allied to chanté-parlé, to which rap belongs.

Despite the difficulty in clearly defining the boundaries of this movement, hip-hop should be considered as a culture or as Marcel Mauss described it, a “total social” phenomenon. Beyond embracing disparate artistic expressions, it refers to an attitude or a relationship with the world shared by the ‘hip-hop nation’ (Cachin, 1996). Graffiti or aero-spray painted murals; the tag culture, dance¹⁹⁵, rap and scratch¹⁹⁶ are the main means of hip-hop expression. Other aspects such as language, dress-code, how to move, etc contributed to forging the identity of the hip-hop movement.

The hip-hop explosion deeply influenced the culture of the past ten years. Increasingly, more music groups of a hip-hop predisposition are emerging in France, USA as well as in Africa and Korea. How did

¹⁹² See Ntarangwi, 2007. He questions the foundations of hip-hop. Is this movement an African renaissance; is it rooted in the oral African tradition or does it correspond to a phenomenon of contemporary society?

¹⁹³ ‘Le chanté-parlé africain’ (Arnaud, 1999). He reminds us that the ‘chanté-parlé’ is not an exclusively African art. This “*style (a mid-ground between speech and song) is found throughout the world, from Hebraic or Islamic chant to Shamanic invocations, while going through the saeta (procession song of the flamenco) and the recitations of Bach’s Passions....*”

¹⁹⁴ ‘The pre-history of rap’, which appeared in the journal *Africultures* (1999).

¹⁹⁵ In hip-hop language, the physical expression is called breakdance or smurf. Olivier Cachin, in the glossary of his book *L’offensive Rap* (1996) defines this dance as “*robotic or acrobatic jerking.*”

¹⁹⁶ According to the definition given by Olivier Cachin (1996), scratch is the “*sound effect produced when a vinyl disk is played backwards on a record player. Scratching is done by all rap DJs.*”

hip-hop become a world culture? Starting from a brief retrospective of its birth, this paper will analyse the conditions that led to its spread throughout the world. This will be followed by a discussion of hip-hop in Tanzania. The aim is to identify the dynamics resulting in the meeting of world culture and the Tanzanian society.

Globalisation of a culture: the case of Tanzanian hip-hop

From New York ghettos to Dar es Salaam

Hip-hop culture emerged in the large metropolitan areas of the American East Coast. This new music wave came after years of disco culture that was described as “*dollarised avatar of soul music which, for an entire decade, bailed out show-business at the expense of the great Afro-American voices.*”¹⁹⁷

At the start of the 1970s, the first scratch techniques were initiated by budding DJs.¹⁹⁸ In 1979, Sugar Hill Gang produced the first rap album ever sold, titled *Rapper's Delight*. Afrika Bambaataa¹⁹⁹, considered today as key to the emerging movement, at the beginning of the 1980s released several albums, with new sounds produced from synthesizers and samplers. He was also the mastermind of the Zulu Nation, an organisation that aimed at promoting “*peace, love and unity.*”²⁰⁰

After the advent of the first hip-hop representatives²⁰¹, another generation referred to as ‘New School’ had its first worldwide rap success. Several artistes and White fans gained interest in hip-hop which first emerged among the Afro-American minority. It was clear that the conditions for music production had improved. The artistes

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Clive Campbell, of Jamaican origin, who was later to be known as Kool DJ Herc, was one of the first DJs in his locality to organize a music party similar to the Blues Dances of Jamaica. He did this from the first sound systems, a “*type of mobile disco with huge loud-speakers.*” (Cachin, 1996).

¹⁹⁹ The history of his name is well-known: he took on the name of a Zulu chief who fought for peace and unity of the South African tribes.

²⁰⁰ Cachin, 1996.

²⁰¹ Afrika Bambaataa, Kool DJ Herc, Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five, etc. were part of the ‘Old School’ of the 1970s–1980s.

had more scope for creativity within a studio setting, using the first digital samplers.

The controversy surrounding rap began to be an issue with New School. Those belonging to this second generation of rappers aimed at denouncing the marginalisation experienced by minorities due to post-industrial capitalist oppression and its destructive social effects. The American government instigated a discriminatory spatial distribution system of different classes of American society. Urbanisation policies initiated under Ronald Reagan's presidency announced the phenomenon of communitarism. The policies confined the immigrant communities to deplorable living quarters, for example former industrial areas.

A majority of the Afro-American community, suffering the effects of exclusion, was therefore sensitive to the appeal to fight for civic rights made by hip-hop militants who were the leading lights in the 1980s.²⁰² Unemployment at the beginning of the 1980s increased greatly due to the economic recession of 1981–1982. The administration reduced the amount of social benefits. Arnaud (1999) notes that at that period the soup kitchens in the poorest areas of New York were always full. The hip-hop artists denounced the continued economic oppression they endured as minorities in a society that was indifferent to their lot. The main themes in their songs were street violence, settling of accounts between gangs and calls for revolution within the immigrant community.

Integration or social-climbing in the American society was inevitably by belonging to a company that in itself provided a certain consumption power. Ownership of goods such as houses or cars defined one's place in society. The ideology of efficiency and productivity defined social success through work. In this context, all those that reacted against the inherent social inequalities in this exacerbated capitalism did not have the public's approval. The media compared these hip-hop actors to delinquents from the foreign community who totally refused to 'integrate' into the society. What sort of youth were these that chanted incomprehensible words and freely covered the town walls with graffiti? What right did they have to make demands? Public opinion was virtually unanimous on this point—they had nothing to discuss with

²⁰² For example Public Enemy, Run DMC (he of the famous *Walk this Way*, sung with Aerosmith), LL Cool J etc.

the delinquents. One could only rebel or worry about this seditious culture taking centre stage in American and European towns. Criticism, mockery and fear entrenched the prejudices towards hip-hop, which was soon referred to in scandalous terms. Thus, misunderstanding and rejection were generally exhibited towards this new artistic movement principally considered as an expression of urban violence propagated by artistes and other militants from the hip-hop movement. The artistes from the West Coast were on the front pages of the 'bad' press. The trials of some rappers implicated in criminal matters reinforced public condemnation for this 'unhealthy' urban trend.

At the same time, new groups emerged. Gradually they distinguished themselves from the gangsta rap trend which had dominated the first years of commercialisation of American hip-hop. They embodied a new rap that focused on more positive values in contrast to the ultra-violent image that had led to the marginalisation of the first American rappers. This new state of mind was interpreted as a return to basics of a pacific hip-hop that had been fervently defended by Africa Bambaata.

In the 1990s, a pluralism of genres within the hip-hop culture captured a new public who henceforth recognised hip-hop as a full and complete culture. Trip hop and jazz rap are examples of the new sensibilities that emerged in hip-hop culture. Support and growing commercial interest in the disc industry for a more expanded view of the culture also contributed to popularising the music internationally. This music was distributed through numerous record dealers. The media—magazines, fanzines, radio and television programmes—began to exploit the growing interest for this music.

As a result of growing media coverage, hip-hop has succeeded in being transferred to other societies. It has eventually won back the support of a trans-cultural youth. This movement is not only taken up by youth from large American and European cities but also by those with a colonial background, and who since independence have been confronted with economic and political realities that are considerably far removed from what is experienced in western societies. Despite these differences, the hip-hop phenomenon developed at a lightning speed in several African countries.

It was at the end of the 1980s that the first young budding African

artistes, witness to an increasingly critical social and economic situation,²⁰³ adopted this new culture. While the initial rap attempts in Africa were rather mediocre as they were copied directly from the American style,²⁰⁴ the artistes later inscribed their local brand and identity. The commandeering of hip-hop did not result in a major mimicry of a western culture but rather to remarkable musical and social dynamics. The Tanzanian example to be discussed in this paper is characteristic of this world culture and at the same time of its capacity to merge into several societies. With regard to the different forms that hip-hop has taken in Africa, we can clearly deduce a prolific syncretism emerged in most countries where this movement has reached.

The Tanzanian hip-hop model confirms the coming out of a highly popular culture:²⁰⁵ hip-hop has built a bridge with the entire society. The political and economic environment in which hip-hop appeared in Tanzania shows distinct characteristics from western societies and also from other East African countries.²⁰⁶ In what milieu did hip-hop emerge in Tanzania and how did those involved in it come to conquer a new public?

Introduction of hip-hop in Tanzania, a contemporary of uwazi

The emergence of hip-hop in Tanzania in the mid-1980s co-existed with a rising world promotion of American rap and an unprecedented political or economic liberation which was termed *uwazi*, which means 'openness'. Tanzania actually displayed a strong resistance to westernisation during its two decades of African socialism.

Take a step back into time to the communism era. In 1964, Julius Nyerere the leader of independent Tanzania, wrote and applied the principles of the Arusha Declaration which showed his determination to

²⁰³ With recurring examples, the dependence on the cost of raw materials in world markets, the weight of corruption in political spheres, the increase of poverty in rural and urban areas, numerous lives ravaged by AIDS and its destructive effects within families etc.

²⁰⁴ See Arnaud (1999), 'Le «chanté-parlé» africain': "[...]the beginnings of African rap were truly pathetic, in the beginning of the 1990s, we saw these terrible imitators of their far away cousins strut about [...]"

²⁰⁵ See Denis-Constant Martin (2000), article on popular culture.

²⁰⁶ See articles by Ferrari, A. (Kenyan hip-hop) and Ntarangwi, M. (East African hip-hop), published in this volume.

create a nation based on community principles. The main consequence of the Arusha Declaration was state control of the economy. The state nationalised the first manufacturing industries which had for the most part been instituted by foreign investors just after *Uhuru*.²⁰⁷ Propaganda systems assured the continuity of African socialism regime. The ‘enemies’ of the Tanzanian nation were described variously as capitalism, individualism, and even excessive emancipation of women’s mores. In this way, the government sought to limit to the point of forbidding the introduction of any western influence.²⁰⁸ The creation of the Ministry of Culture and Youth aimed at the country’s unification through a process of homogenisation of the language and culture of the nation. In Mwalimu Nyerere’s famous speech inaugurating the ministry²⁰⁹, he expressed his regret that Tanzanians seemed more attracted to European music forms²¹⁰ such as the twist, the rumba, the chachacha, the rock-and-roll, the waltz and the foxtrot. As a political demagogue, he sought to legitimise an intensive promotion of a so-called traditional Tanzanian culture. The *ngoma za asili* groups were considered highly by the authorities as conduits for diffusing the socialist ideology among the Tanzanian youth.²¹¹ A strong collusion between politics and culture was forged as a result of this propaganda. What were the consequences of the collapse of African socialism on cultural life in Tanzania? What new cultural dynamics characterised the years of economic liberalisation?

In 1985, the founder of *Ujamaa* withdrew from the bitter failure of his socialist economic policy and nominated a new political figure, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, to lead the country. For a decade, this latter rushed

²⁰⁷ Cf Shivji (1975, p. 163): “The strategy adopted by the post-independence government typically involved inviting foreign investments. The First Five-Year Plan allocated something like 80 per cent of investments to foreign sources.” Also, during colonial times, the settlers whom the presence was restricted in Tanganyika compared to others East African countries, concentrated on growing raw materials to replenish first the stocks of German Empire, then those of the British Empire. In so doing, they did not encourage the expansion of the industrial sector in their colony.

²⁰⁸ Cf Perullo (2003): “[...] foreign music was formerly forbidden under the government’s strict socialist policies.” However, Mangesho (2003) notes that despite laws intended to censor this music, pirated cassettes from internationally famous groups like “*Grease*, *ABBA*, *Boney M* and musicians like *James Brown*” (p. 35) circulated in the country.

²⁰⁹ ‘Mwalimu’ is the Kiswahili word for teacher. This head of state/teacher fusion was destined to earn the undying respect of the citizens for the founder the African socialist ideology.

²¹⁰ Cf Nyerere’s speech of 10/12/1962, quoted in Askew, 2002 (p. 13).

²¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 14: “*Ngoma*, or ‘traditional dances’, are valued for essentializing both ‘tradition’ and the ethnic groups that perform them. At the same time, however, they are subjected to modification to accommodate nationalist goals and objectives.”

Tanzania into an era of liberal capitalism. The order of the day was the word *rukasa*, or the freedom to be an entrepreneur, to invest or import. This move from a centralised economy to a free economy is still etched in the memories of numerous traders. However, the first waves of privatisation initiated in the Mwinyi decade mainly benefited the Asian and Muslim communities.²¹²

Following pressures of the international authorities, the Tanzanian government decided to democratise the country by organising the first multiparty elections in 1995. The international community forced the new government to undertake macroeconomic reforms such as devaluating the Tanzanian currency. The privatisation of former state institutions built up during the *rukasa* period began in earnest. As a result, the Tanzanian generation born in the 1980s to 1990s was the first to experience the political and economic emancipation of the country. Along with this expanded economic and political freedom, cultural freedom was also experienced.

Whereas under Nyerere, the media and culture were placed under high surveillance by the authorities, in the 1990s there was greater freedom of expression and dissemination of information. Gradually the media began to broadcast music that was rather different from the 'classic' Tanzanian music. Up to the end of the 1980s, *ngoma* groups (traditional dancers), *kwaya* (religious choirs), *taarab* and *dansi*²¹³ were the four major music genres that had hitherto prevailed on the Tanzanian music scene.²¹⁴ It is in this context of easy access to external influences that the young Tanzanian generation discovered hip-hop.

What sort of welcome did the Tanzanian society accord to this flourishing culture emanating from the ghettos of New York? What effect did it have in a country deeply marked by political, social, economic and cultural transformations?

²¹² Cf Heilman, 1998; p. 376 and Maupeu, 2001; p. 82.

²¹³ Askew (2002) translates *dansi* as “‘dance’ music, or heavily Zairean-influenced urban popular music” (p. 69). Mangesho’s definition (2003) emphasises that “the importance of the guitar, the strength of the Democratic Republic of Congo [...] jazz influence, the juxtaposition of traditional Tanzanian patterns and relationship with new musical ideas and instruments.” (p. 25).

²¹⁴ Cf Martin 1983.

The weak entry of hip-hop into the country at the end of the 1980s stumbled against the weight of the socialist ideology heritage as well as a fledgling music industry. Indeed, the public's incomprehension of this new music and the meagre infrastructures at the disposal of the country slowed down the spread of the music in the country. The first public to listen to hip-hop came from young urban dwellers that had privileged access to international music. In that era, hip-hop was only listened to by a tiny fraction of the post-*Ujamaa* generation comprising those who lived in towns where a gradual opening up to the outside world was most felt. Some had contact with the USA or Europe which helped them to access the prevailing culture and the American hip-hop movement.²¹⁵

The first artistes and sympathisers initiated into this movement were received with great hue and cry by the Tanzanian public. According to Ras Lion, several young people were obliged to listen to or record the first American music releases on radio on the sly. The music was perceived by society as muziki ya kihuni or music for delinquents. This view is rooted in the colonial and post-colonial history of the country.

Hip-hop spread in a country where the youth had only recently been subjected to administrative authority. Authority was initially used to end the chief system in order to annihilate all ethnic impulses. After Independence, the young generation mainly living in *Ujamaa* villages, was asked to follow the instructions of the local, regional and national authorities which demanded complete docility of the Tanzanian citizens. Respect and obedience by the youth towards the administrative representatives was thus required. This submission to authority allowed for relocating 80% of the population during the villagisation operations initiated by Nyerere. The idea was to compel the villagers to live in a community in order to take part in agricultural activities and to set up sanitation and academic infrastructure. According to the communist ideology propagated by Nyerere, the economy of the country depended on the citizens' dedication to agricultural production which would lead

²¹⁵ Cf P.J. Haas and T. Gesthuizen, p. 281: “Before the period of liberalization and privatization [...], rap reached only a limited number of individuals in Tanzania who had special contacts with friends or family living outside the country.”

to self-sufficiency. The future and glory of the nation thus took place in the *Ujamaa* villages. Nyerere often used the term the 'backbone' (*uti wa mgongo*) of the country's economy in reference to agriculture. He emphasised the deliberate choice of socialist leaders to concentrate all their productive efforts on the developing the primary sector. This image served to similarly feed the demagogy of the government. By equating agriculture to *uti wa mgongo*, he stressed the importance of the participation of citizens in agriculture.

In reality, the harsh living conditions in the villages led many young people to attempt a different course of life in urban areas. While the initial rural-urban migrations began at the start of the colonial era, the British authorities endeavoured to prevent this through expulsion. It was considered a criminal offence to be in the city without a residence status.²¹⁶ After independence, the new authorities authorised the police who were deployed in the urban areas to mete out the same treatment to all those found flagrantly breaking the law of community work. The young *wahuni* in the towns represented a threat to the process of nation-building. In a similar socialist tradition, women found walking in town on their own were regarded as prostitutes (Brennan, forthcoming).²¹⁷ The demonisation of urban populations was aimed at venerating village life.

The negative perception of urban youth as idle, non-productive, and susceptible to delinquent behaviour which prevailed in the Nyerere era rose to the surface once at the same time as hip-hop's arrival in the country. Indeed, the trend from the Tanzanian society to reject the first wave of hip-hop artists and fans took centre stage at the beginning of the hip-hop experience in Tanzania. At the end of the 1980s, the first Tanzanian hip-hop artistes reproduced the American-style gangsta rap. The public was generally stubborn in their attitude towards the *wahuni* who, according to them, sowed discord in a society that had barely rid itself of 20 years of socialism. Most of the songs were not understood by the larger public since, according to some *wazee* of Dar es Salaam, because composed in English and they were not meaningful. The older

²¹⁶ Cf Andrew Burton's seminal work on the history of expulsion of young migrants who roamed the cities.

²¹⁷ Brennan's article attempts to deconstruct the rhetoric of socialist and nationalist thinking of the *Ujamaa* period (1958–1976).

generation of the Nyerere era expressed their disapproval towards hip-hop saying “*these songs were not good, they made no sense.*” This judgment frequently comes up in discussions on the beginnings of the hip-hop in Tanzania. The recurring themes in the first releases by Tanzanian artistes took up those that had been explored by the first American rappers such as inner-city violence and gang battles. At the same time, the baggy sport clothes, gold chains, sneakers and others accessories worn by the rap singers reflected unacceptable attitudes to the Nyerere generation. Thus, the urban areas which, according to the demagogues of the *Ujamaa* period, were fields of decadence *par excellence*, were again condemned by public opinion. The emerging culture was a new form of delinquency going by the rappers’ and hip-hop converts’ behaviour. Consequently, the first hip-hop artistes at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s were in a society that highly disapproved of the youth’s interest in this *muziki ya kihuni*.

The following is an extract from an interview with one of the first rappers in Tanzania, Saleh Jabri, a.k.a. the King of Swahili rap. It confirms the prevailing incomprehension towards the youth at the inception of Tanzanian hip-hop. “*This was a time when hip-hop in Tanzania was still seen as ‘uhuni’ or gangsterism, associated with crime and drugs. This situation has changed only recently! There’s an entire generation of Tanzanian rappers that had to cope with disapproval by their families, teachers etc.*”²¹⁸

The first militants who set off hip-hop in Tanzania are often ironical about the pioneering generation that loomed on the scene with scraps of rap moulded from the American model. The manner in which current journalists, radio presenters and rappers perceive this first generation reveals the changes that characterised hip-hop in Tanzania. They often bring up the attitude of the premier artistes who imitated American stars by adopting the same language, the same gestures and by copying their dressing style.²¹⁹ According to some journalists, the obscene words

²¹⁸ Cf the interview done in October 2001 with Saleh, J and Thomas Gesthuizen, accessible online at www.africanhiphop.com. This anglophone site funded by a Dutch NGO is the most comprehensive electronic portal onto the latest music news on African hip-hop. It promotes new hip-hop albums such the latest from Mister II, ‘Sugu’, which was released in 2004.

²¹⁹ Extracted from the magazine *The Entertainer* (date unknown), presenting the artist Prof. Jay: “[...] they (the first Tanzanian rappers) just mimicked western artistes of the day such as

of some American rap titles scandalised the Tanzanian society.²²⁰ Their lyrics were of an esoteric nature to the public who were not familiar with the English language. Just like the older generation that claimed the music lacked a clear and comprehensible message, the journalists explained the public's aversion to this culture as a result of the moral void in the initial hip-hop releases.²²¹

From American mimicry to the original creation of rap in Kiswahili

At the very beginning of Tanzanian rap, no one had even the slightest inkling of rapping in Kiswahili (Haas and Gesthuizen, 2000). What was considered cultural mimicry²²² or a pale imitation of typically American rap soon disintegrated under the effect of the contribution of numerous elements coming from Tanzanian society. Hip-hop crossed a major hurdle when the artistes opted to use the vernacular language as propagated by the Father of the Nation. This language choice gave a distinctive identity to hip-hop in the Tanzanian society.²²³ Prof. Jay, one of the oldest artistes of the hip-hop scene in Tanzania, evokes the progressive advance of a new generation which slowly but surely evolved from this American model to create a particular style which was the fruit of a dynamic Tanzanian creation.²²⁴

Easy E or NWA in general, Cool Moe D, LL Cool J, Public Enemy, among others."

²²⁰ A *Bingwa* journalist (03/06/03) explains that the first artistes used abusive and threatening language as in America. "Lugha za matusi na zenye vitisho kama ambavyo walikuwa wanafanya Wamerikani."

²²¹ A *Bingwa* journalist (05/04/02) emphasises the violent appearance of the first hip-hop artistes which was the object of strong criticism. He is justified in the view that the Tanzanian community was totally indifferent to this culture which brought nothing to them. "Wakati wanaanza kina Mr. II na wenzake kama Kwanza Unity ambao si rahisi kutaja mafanikio ya Hip-hop [...] muziki huo ulikuwa unaonekana kama wa wahuni. Hakuna aliyejali kusikiliza, sababu ulionekana ni muziki wa watu fulani, tena ambao ni wapenda fujo, wavaa vidani puani au sikioni tu, na haukuwa na faida yoyote kwa jamii ya Tanzania."

²²² Olivier Barlet, in the editorial of *Africulture* on the hip-hop culture talks of a first African hip-hop that would have vacillated between a "sterile mimicry or affirmation of roots for a living syncretism." See his article 'Le Défi', October 1999.

²²³ Compare Perullo (2003), who clearly shows the underlying ideologies in the linguistic choice used since the beginning of hip-hop in Tanzania.

²²⁴ Compare Prof. Jay's interview which appeared in *The Entertainer* (date unknown): "When I was in Form 1, in the 1990s, we slowly started building and moulding our hip-hop careers. We structured rhymes and styles, trying to formulate our art and culture through our music."

In the beginning of the 1990s, Saleh J of Dar-es-Salaam, recorded highly popular titles which were aired on private radio stations using a recording system that he had at home (one supra double cassette with mike).²²⁵ He re-wrote a local version of an American rap hit ‘Power’, by Snap. However, what propelled him onto the national scene was the Kiswahili version of ‘Ice Ice Baby’ by Vanilla Ice. Saleh J had initially recorded this song on cassette, and copies were sold in kiosks around his home area.

My friends who used to visit me at home went crazy when they heard it and asked me to have the copy so I gave them blindly. [...] I don't know which one of my friends went to the Indian distributors and sold it only as a single... One day one of my friends came and told me that my song is heard all over Uhuru Street... I didn't believe him... (www.africanhiphop.com, 2001).

Saleh J performed this song at a hip-hop competition in 1991²²⁶ and was awarded the first prize. His success gave other budding artistes the idea of composing free-style rap in Kiswahili. In the context of a fluid and growing music tradition, the pioneers of hip-hop performed “*for fun and not for money*” (Saleh J., 2001). The public scorn towards this sort of music along with very basic recording equipment available made it difficult to predict a promising future for Tanzanian hip-hop.²²⁷ During the laborious beginning of this new culture, Congolese or Tanzanian *dansi*, *taarab*²²⁸ and reggae groups as well as *ngoma* were the major genres of music played and listened to throughout the country. Apart from reggae, the other forms of music were part of a relative continuity of music trends since the socialist period.²²⁹ In the 1990s,

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ This contest called Yo ! Rap Bonanza launched several rappers onto the hip-hop music scene in Tanzania in the beginning of the 1990s.

²²⁷ During an interview with Mister II (3 June, 2004), he vividly expressed the spirit of the first Tanzanian artistes who ventured into the hip-hop adventure. At that time, rapping was more for the fun of it than for any other reason. It was quite difficult to know that it was the advent of an emerging phenomenon “*Tunapiga kwenye maonyesho*” (we only perform at concerts). Mister II asserted that the first rap cassettes of Tanzanian rap went from hand to hand, as there was no distributor or recording studio interested in supporting this music.

²²⁸ See Askew’s outstanding anthropological work on *taarab* (1992), which she describes as “*sung Swahili poetry*” (p. 69). It examines the political logical dissecting the dominant music styles during her field study—*dansi*, *taarab* and *ngoma*—cleverly showing their overlap into the political arena.

²²⁹ At that time, *dansi* was considered Tanzanian music by the authorities (Mangesho, 2003; p. 25).

the greatest music success came straight from Zaire.²³⁰ At that period, the music industry was still in its infancy. Some artistes recorded their albums in Kenya up until 1977, when Kenya closed its borders. Music production in Tanzania was technically limited as compared with its Kenyan neighbour. At the end of the 1980s, all the artistes who wanted to commercialise their music went to the few recording studios in the capital. Only two studios were in working condition before the wave of liberalisation of the disc market. These were Radio Tanzania Dar-es-Salaam and TFC (Mangesho, 2003).

During the socialist era, while Nyerere strongly defended the so-called ‘traditional’ music, it did not benefit from an environment that encouraged its long-term development. After *uwazi*, in 1996 MJ Records was set up in a 20-foot container which also hosted more dansi groups than rap artistes. Hip-hop music was still minority music and not lucrative. Consequently, very few rap artistes produced albums in the 1998–2000 period. Despite these faltering beginnings in the music industry and limited recording facilities, the great desire of some artistes to launch into hip-hop did not doze off. A growing popularisation of hip-hop through the media encouraged more and more artistes to enter into *muziki ya kizazi kipya*, the music of the new generation.²³¹

Initial attempts to promote hip-hop

Private radio stations played an important role in the initiation and familiarisation of hip-hop in the 1990s. The stations were formed after new legislation in communication was passed. The Tanzania Broadcasting Act of 1993 replaced “the *Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam Act No 11 of 1965, which made RTD the only mouthpiece of the government and the party.*” (Mangesho, 2003). The repealing of the previous law which conceded all powers to a pro-government RTD radio precipitated the entry of new FM stations on the airwaves. Some

²³⁰ This old generation melancholically recalls this music of the 1970s, entertaining a society that was “*united and people were full of hope*”, according to an article by Miguel Suleyman, titled ‘Seventies Music is All the Rage Again’, which appeared in *The East African*, 10–16 May, 2004.

²³¹ This Kiswahili expression is often used by the media to indicate a collection of music with origins from outside, for example R&B.

of the most popular radio stations today are Clouds FM, Radio One, Radio Uhuru and Times FM.

Media promotion of hip-hop was initially the work of a few radio presenters, who were willing to play rap on their shows, despite the prevailing disdain that the society had towards hip-hop artistes. They actively agitated in favour of sensitisation broadcasts of hip-hop music that were aired by the first Tanzanian DJs. The most popular American rap hits²³² coupled with the tentative appearance of the first Tanzanian artistes²³³ captivated an audience that was more receptive to rap aired on radio. At the same time, a resistance to the hip-hop culture was evident in private radio stations. Some employees belonged to the older generation that was still against external musical influences.²³⁴ They were among those that considered it the bad fruit of a western influence, which was likely to corrupt the youth in Tanzania. This poor image was worsened by the airing of American rap video clips on television, “*showing people dressed in coats covering their faces, holding chains and baseball clubs, fighting and holding guns, men wearing turbans like women, or praising marijuana*” (Mangesho, 2003).

Nevertheless, due to the efforts by radio presenters and their militant nature, hip-hop experienced its first period of public awareness in the 1995 to 1998 period. Some broadcasts advertised the first concerts of Kiswahili rap, such as the earlier mentioned Yo! Rap Bonanza competition, rewarding the best Tanzanian rapper of the year. Singers like Kwanza Unit and Mister II²³⁵ were on the music scene very early. These shows were often organised with very little resources. Increasingly, music competitions held throughout the country helped popularise Kiswahili hip-hop.

Sporadic music shows in urban areas were the first places in which

²³² Mangesho (2003) cites Snoop Doggy Dogg, Dr Dre, Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G.

²³³ Quoted here is Taji Liundi, a former radio presenter, currently the manager of Radio Times. Radio One, a private station, was one of the first to break the Radio RTD's monopoly. During an interview with Mister II and Mac D, two major Tanzanian hip-hop artistes, they advised that an interview with this personality, who influences the history of hip-hop would be greatly beneficial. Unfortunately, we could not meet him.

²³⁴ Mangesho (2003, p. 47): “*According to Mr Liundi, the management of Radio One ‘which contained a lot of old people’ was very reluctant for them to air Swahili rap.*”

²³⁵ He is today considered by his peers as the mkongwe or veteran of Tanzanian hip-hop. Mister II, at the very beginning of his career was known as 2 Proud. He was the first hip-hop artiste to produce a Kiswahili rap album.

Kiswahili rap was heard and performed. Such competitions were held in an international secondary school in Dar es Salaam. Anyone who wished to participate was allowed to enter. However, there was one condition—the participants were required to compose something on the theme of *utamaduni*, the Tanzanian culture. Two brothers entered the competition with an unexpectedly riveting rap presentation. Their earlier songs had been on AIDS and safe sex. According to the group Kwanza Unit, this show on the history of hip-hop in Tanzania marked the transition from rap in English to rap on social issue, performed in Kiswahili (Hass and Gesthuizen, 2000). Following this, an ever increasing number of young students in the economic capital took part in the *matamasha* (music shows) in which budding rappers competed.²³⁶

At the end of the 1990s, young listeners were urged to bring their original compositions to radio stations to be aired and heard by others. A good example is seen in the case of the popular Radio Uhuru presenter, Sebastien Mganga, who gave his listeners the opportunity to take part in radio competitions in which they chanted directly into the telephone. The winner landed a free recording session at the Sound Crafters studio, based in Temeke, Dar es Salaam. The prerequisite for taking part in the competition was that one had to perform positive and meaningful rap.²³⁷ By the end of the 1990s, a glimpse of what Kiswahili rap would be—instructive and informative—could be seen. The ‘Talent Show’ initiated by Taji Liundi which was directly broadcasted on Radio Times also organised an open-mic competition which gave those who dared an opportunity to showcase their talent.²³⁸ Radio broadcasts thus contributed to create a dynamic music scene.

²³⁶ Extracted from an article that appeared in *Bingwa*: “Wanafunzi wa sekondari mbalimbali wakaudaka muziki huo, ikawa kila matamasha wanashindana kurap” (secondary students took advantage of opportunities to participate every time there was a show where they could take part in rap competitions).

²³⁷ Cf Mangesho (2000), p. 51.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 52. A large group of contemporary popular artistes were for the first time pinpointed during this concert that was attended by music producers. Among these artistes were TID, Solo Thang, Mwanafalsafa, Sister P, Wagosi wa Kaya, Juma Nature and Da Jo.

Improved media coverage and popularization of hip-hop

At the end of the 1990s, hip-hop began to appeal to a growing public, both in the towns and villages. Nowadays, many villagers visiting the towns take the opportunity to stock up on music cassettes from the various stalls. Even though villagers are always occupied with work in the fields, many of them go to *kilabu* (clubs) on Sunday to drink local beer and relax with the sounds of Tanzanian hip hop. In the rural areas without electricity, those who have battery-operated radio cassette players freely play such music in the community. In the semi-rural residential estates that have electricity²³⁹, the *kilabu* have a regular daily clientele.

Despite the slow development of communication infrastructure in Tanzania, radio was the main means through which hip-hop spread to most Tanzanians. The minor or non-existent presence of the press and television in countryside, in which three-quarters of the population²⁴⁰ lives, explains the continued dominance of radio. The lack of electricity in the villages and the limited finances of most villagers constrain access to information via the press and television. Television sets²⁴¹ are mainly seen in urban areas in social places such as bars, hotels, cyber cafes, hairdressing salons and roadside kiosks. Even today television is still most often watched within a group and very rarely is it an individual acquisition. Tanzanian newspapers are only distributed in urban areas or in towns situated along the main roads. The papers are hardly ever read by women for cultural and economic reasons (Mwendamseke, 2003). Several internet sites offer news on Tanzanian hip-hop, but these

²³⁹ This relies on observations in Mang'ula village which is situated at the foot of the Udzungwa mountains. The *kilabu* or local bar in this place has a more regular clientele than compared to the more isolated village of Udekwa which is in the interior of the mountains, on the opposite slope. During the field study in this village, old musicians were interviewed, who showed the percussion instruments that they played during special occasions in the village (weddings, funerals etc). These instruments however remain in the cottages of their owners as the current generation has turned their back on traditional music. This generation only swears by Bongo Flava hits.

²⁴⁰ While more than 80% of the Tanzanian population lives in rural areas, the number of town dwellers is increasing due to a large and constant stream of youth from the villages into the towns.

²⁴¹ The number of television channels grows each year. In 1973, in Zanzibar, the first television station (TVZ) was launched. Today, there are more than nine stations in Dar es Salaam (Mangesho, 2003).

are consulted by a very small population, mainly those living in urban areas.²⁴² As a result, radio in Tanzania plays a primary role in the media coverage of hip-hop. Going by the prevailing economic immobility in the villages, radio has a long future ahead.

Since the explosion of Swahili rap, the Kiswahili press also contributes to the sensitization process. A stream of low-priced newspapers (*Kiu, Ijumaa, Bingwa, Kasheshe, Lete Raha, Komesha, Chekanao*, etc.) publishes brief news on American and Tanzanian hip-hop artistes. These weekly or bi-weekly magazines are mainly sold by the *wamachinga* in the city streets and have proven to be rather successful. However, they are often subject to admonition from the older generation. Laid out on makeshift display racks, these papers often have photos of scantily-dressed women taken from crowds at hip-hop concerts or other places where excitable music is played or performed. These cover pages are often the cause of complaints expressed from some urban citizens, which coincide with the generation-gap conflict. English-language newspapers which are more centred on local and international news (*The Guardian, The Sunday Observer, The Daily News*) occasionally print news on music although this may be with a very limited view of 'modern' Tanzanian music. An example is seen in the article of the *Sunday Observer* (6 June 2004), 'Can the «new generation» find a market abroad?' which discussed whether the new generation of artistes would be appreciated abroad although this music has already penetrated the US²⁴³ market and is quite popular in Kenya. The Kenyan article in the *Sunday Review* (13 September 2003) titled 'Tanzanians stealing the local show' indicates the weak knowledge of contemporary youth music by the Tanzanian press. The writer describes the Kenyan craze for this new Tanzanian style known as 'Bongo Flava.' The most popular Tanzanian artistes in Kenya are listed as TID (*Top In Dar*), Jahmo, Gangwe Mob, Mad Ice and Mr Nice. This Kenyan article indicates the weakness of the English language press' knowledge of contemporary youth music.²⁴⁴

²⁴² A journalist from *The Guardian* notes that 1/5000 Tanzanian uses the internet while in Europe and France the figure stands at one in five. With regard to the poverty affecting the majority of the Tanzanian population, he says "the current interest in bringing Internet to all corners of the country remains ambiguous and not comprehensive" (14/07/04).

²⁴³ 'Tanzanian music gains popularity in US' by Eric Toroka. www.Africanhiphop.com.

²⁴⁴ However, some important changes have been noticed since *The Guardian* increased the price of its newspaper this year. There is a special section on 'Sports & Entertainment', in which several articles deal with current Tanzanian or/and international music.

More and more Tanzanian magazines (*Femina*, *Sportscene*, etc.) focus on the youth, sports, lifestyle and write long articles on *muziki ya kizazi kipya*. A very strong media and artistic dynamic have been thus built around hip-hop in Tanzania. Hip-hop concerts (festivals, competitions, shows, etc.) are announced almost every week in Dar es Salaam and in the towns. The cities attracting a huge public and according to Mister II²⁴⁵ the most lucrative are Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Arusha and Zanzibar. Different types of hip-hop shows can be identified. Competitive concerts are aimed at selecting the singer of the year as the competitions Mfalme wa Rhymes 2004, Kilimanjaro Premium Lager Tanzania Music Awards. Others are presented as cultural parties such as Tamasha la Muziki (the music festival organised by Alliance française), Fiesta 2004 (Dar–Mwanza–Arusha), Champion's day, etc. There are also concerts intended to inaugurate the release of new albums. These can be held in one or several towns, but it all depends on the finances available to the artiste, the sponsors and the artiste's position in the competition. The most marketed artistes are often accompanied by other artistes for support or who come to congratulate one of them.

The consecration of Kiswahili rap—mapinduzi halisi ya Bongo Flava

In the 1998–2000 period, Tanzanian hip-hop went by at a very high speed. The international success of American rap, its airing on the first private Tanzanian radio stations and the opening of new recording studios encouraged young artistes to emerge on the scene. Hip-hop concerts soon dominated the popular music in Dar es Salaam as well as other urban centres. The music came to be considered the increasingly sought after economic manna by private businesses. Since then, private sponsors—companies such as Coca Cola, Kilimanjaro and other private enterprises—have become the major financial backers solicited by concert organisers and artistes themselves. After the unquestionable success of hip-hop in Tanzania and the development of the disc industry, music that had previously ruled the music scene was rapidly overtaken by the unfurling hip-hop wave.²⁴⁶ In the televised media, new music

²⁴⁵ Interview, 3 June 2004.

²⁴⁶ As the Congolese *dansi* disappears, Tanzanian *dansi* groups for example Twanga Pepeta, Extra Bongo and many others have rounded up a large crowd since they appeared on the

broadcasts²⁴⁷ started to promote the fist videos of Tanzanian rappers.²⁴⁸

At the end of the 1990s, the production speed of hip-hop was amazing. Hip-hop, according to a young fan in Morogoro, literally conquered the entire Tanzanian society. Both the old and young accepted this new music form which was for the first time recognised and given the name Bongo Flava. At the moment, this designation has spread countrywide like a puff of smoke. This established title which is bandied about by the media requires a step back in time. In Nyerere's era, the word 'bongo' referred to Dar es Salaam. Since then, it has experienced a progressive semantic growth. As an example, the introduction of Tanzanian hip-hop songs in Kenya²⁴⁹ blurred geographical borders referred to in 'bongo'. According to some artistes, the word could also encompass the whole of East Africa, countries in which Bongo Flava has infiltrated. In the hip-hop arena, Mister II in his 1996 album *Ndani ya Bongo* was the first to use the word. Then in 2000, the group Hard Blasters released a song which was one of Tanzania's greatest successes. The leader of this group, Prof Jay, who is performing now as a solo singer, marked a decisive turning point in the history of hip-hop with his song *Chemsha Bongo*. This song has a double entendre—*bongo* means intelligence and also Dar es Salaam, and by extension, Tanzania. The singer admits in a magazine *The Entertainer* that "*the song was powerful and the overall performance was incredible. It was something Tanzania had never seen before.*"

scene. Moreover, the classics of the 1970s (urban jazz groups, rumba...) have today been re-done and returned to popularity. Bongo Flava artistes are quick to gain inspiration from these forms and do cover versions. Refer to the section on the 'come back' of the veterans of this music trend in *The EastAfrican* of 10–16 May, 2004, 'We're back ! Seventies Music is all the rage again'.

²⁴⁷ Channel 5 plays foreign and local hip-hop music.

²⁴⁸ Even through video production is not yet so well developed in Tanzania, more and more artistes release their clips often soon after the song has been played on FM stations. Prof. Jay emphasises the importance of videos to ensure maximum artistic promotion and tries to send these beyond the country's borders.

²⁴⁹ According to Mac D, Kenyans seem to prefer the kinds of songs described as '*za kuburudisha*'. The most popular titles are those by artistes who in Tanzania would be classified under singers of relaxation music, which do not exactly have a serious message, for example Mister Nice. Prof Jay who belongs to the two hip-hop categories—*yenye historia na ujumbe*—sings casual songs stories and also music with a message, appears to make his music known beyond Tanzania, like in Kenya. It remains to be seen if the songs with a more social message will be accepted by the Kenyan youth.

The generally widespread appreciation for this music was quite reasonably considered as a ‘revolution’ as much as the first generation of rappers were distrusted or even highly condemned by a large sector of the society. The singer of *Chemsha Bongo* who has been on the scene for several years has since been referred to as “*Mwanapinduzi wa Hip Hop nchini*” or the hip-hop revolutionary in the country.²⁵⁰ The national and inter-generational success of hip-hop music gave the year 2000 the distinction of *mapinduzi halisi ya Bongo Flava*, that is, the true Bongo Flava revolution. This expression underlines the reversal of appreciation that was seen in public opinion and in the world of music. After years of mistrust and severe condemnation towards new generation singers, the hip-hop representatives earned the favour of the Tanzanian society. The Bongo Flava formula was rapidly adopted by some DJs working for radios airing hip hop music. Mangesho (2003) cites the opinion of DJ Papa Luv, “*another DJ, Phat Black by name, later started a program and called it ‘bongo flavours session’ which was by then strictly R&B, bongo hip hop, and zouk-like songs. Last year DJ Venture and DJ Steve B renamed it ‘Bongo Flava’; the name used up to the present!*”. Mangesho also recalls the first use of the term ‘bongo’ in *muziki ya kizazi kipya* during the launching of Bongo Records in 1995. Today, Bongo Flava has taken on very different meanings depending on the user. For the older generations, it seems that any mention of Bongo Flava refers to the collection of music recently introduced in Tanzania, such as rap and R&B. For those in the music industry (journalists, event organizers and artistes), Bongo Flava is considered as a distinct form of hip-hop.²⁵¹ The music categorizations are therefore fluid and depend on how each listener or artiste perceives the evolution of the new music in Tanzania. For several years now, Kiswahili rap has greatly diversified. It is constantly mutating. It has various genres such as *mdundiko* hip-hop, ‘cartoon’ rap, and hardcore Kiswahili rap.²⁵² *Mdundiko* hip-hop was the initiative of the group Mambo Jambo, which included traditional

²⁵⁰ *Kiu*, 31 May–3 June 2004.

²⁵¹ During an interview with Prof Jay (25 May 2004), he corrected the notion of associating his music with Bongo Flava. He defined Tanzanian hip-hop as music that handled “*mambo ya jamii*” [the community’s problems], including “*jinsi unavyodress*” [mode of dressing]. He compared this with taarab, which in contrast with hip-hop, was open—*ziko wazi*—with the message given to the public explicitly.

²⁵² Mangesho (2003, p. 17) enumerates these sub-forms emphasising that they do not represent all the styles that make up hip-hop in Tanzania.

dances performed by the Wazaramo²⁵³ during ceremonies. However, this original style has not been emulated.

Cartoon rap (*katuni*) is still present today in the hip-hop music scene. This kind of music, as the name suggests, is mainly meant to entertain the listeners. Mr. Nice is one of the biggest performers of *katuni* rap. He has become the indisputable star of Bongo Flava. In fact, his records, one of which is the great *Fagilia*, have had great success in Tanzania as well as in Kenya. Mr. Nice is classified in the category of artistes who sing mainly *kuburudisha jamii*, to entertain the society, youth, children and the older generation. His style and international fame is often the subject of opposing debate, spiced up by the scandals surrounding him²⁵⁴ and is cashed in on by the local press.

Another very interesting fusion emerged onto the hip-hop scene, *Taa-rap*. This Mangesho defines as “*Zanzibar rap version fused with Taarab*.”²⁵⁵ The magic multiform of rap cited by Arnaud²⁵⁶ is thus quite obvious using the example of Kiswahili rap. The different styles that have been cited do not take into account all the forms that increasingly multiply virtually everyday in the current music arena. Other novel styles have filled up the Bongo Flava music currents. Ray C, an international songstress became famous from her first record *Mapenzi yangu*, sung with an Indian influence.²⁵⁷ New groups try to make an impact by reproducing the styles of their predecessors or by trying out a new style. Recently, a new group Akili the Brain, promoted its first hit *Nakupenda Regina*. The singer is a young Tanzanian of Asian origin. The originality of this record is the heavy mix of genres which bear witness to the strength of Tanzanian hip-hop in converging several varied cultures. Mode of dress, the staccato monotonous chant of rap, body gestures etc. constitute these elements present in the numerous ‘sub-forms’ of Bongo Flava (Mangesho, 2003: 17).

Kiswahili rap is today recognized by society in general as a music genre on its own. African hip-hop dance is an interesting field of study,

²⁵³ The Wazaramo belong to an ethnic group originated in the region of Dar es Salaam.

²⁵⁴ An informant from Burundi described him as a charlatan, referring to his violent altercation with another rapper Dudubaya in Bilicanas, a popular night club in Dar es Salaam.

²⁵⁵ Mangesho (2003) p. 124.

²⁵⁶ Cf *Africultures*, no 21, ‘La Préhistoire du rap’.

²⁵⁷ See the article in the *Femina* magazine (May–July 2004), ‘Ray C goes international.’

which however, is not covered in this paper. During concerts, artistes are often accompanied by dancers who are recognized as stars in their own field.²⁵⁸ Their choreography does not borrow only from the staccato break-dance style. Dancers accompanying hip-hop singers often have fluid²⁵⁹ movements quite similar to the body motions of some *ngoma za asili* dance troupes.

The tricky breakthrough of hip-hop in Tanzania gave way to prolific and huge media coverage of artistes. The second part of this paper will focus on the distinct political and civic orientation which characterised the first Kiswahili hip-hop artistes and how it allowed them to reconcile the public with the hip-hop artistes. The paper will also show how this trend was kept up and even reinforced despite the relentless commercialisation of Bongo Flava. Also discussed will be the effects of this intense commercialisation of Bongo Flava in the artistes' milieu. Does the explosion of genres and the clear preference of radio for commercial rap sound the death knell for Tanzanian hip-hop?

Confirmation of hip-hop with political and social leanings

Faced with a harsh economic reality, some youth in towns began, through rap in Kiswahili, to express their fears and anxieties on the future of the country. A communion between a growing public and the young artistes was made possible thanks to the postulated desire of these artistes to establish a hip-hop that the Tanzania society could identify with. The themes developed by the artistes were directly inspired by the daily life of a youth exposed to political, economic and socio-cultural changes of the 1990s. These young people have witnessed the catastrophes of vicious economic changes which begun in 1986. The great inequalities between the social classes have widened. The sentiments of the youth, torn between the choice of staying in the village to engage in barely

²⁵⁸ Examples of these are the famous dancing twins Sunche and Kapeto, who were performed at Dudubaya's show in Morogoro, 2 April 2004.

²⁵⁹ Ray C became famous for her wave-like choreography. This earned her the nickname of *kiuno bila mfupa*—the singer with a boneless waist.

profitable agriculture²⁶⁰ or to an increasingly difficult life in town, were expressed through the songs of the first artistes of Kiswahili rap.

The eloquence of the rappers won over the entire Tanzanian society. Hip-hop was from then on carefully listened to by the Tanzanians who could 'see' themselves in the words of the singers. A unique alliance took place between the 'receivers' and the 'source' of hip-hop. It was no longer considered the 'bad seed' to be kept away from FM radio waves. The themes discussed by the hip-hop artistes will be studied by subdividing them in three sections. The first will expose several references to the difficulties of daily life in the town and villages, tormented by the consequences of a liberal capitalism. The second section will emphasise on the political involvement of some hip-hop singers who have opted to express their discontent towards government policies. The final section focuses on the wish of some artistes to protect themselves from the commercial domination of softer genres by generating a civic hip-hop intended to spread social and political messages.

The spokespeople for a society in crisis

The first hip-hop artistes considered themselves spokespersons of a disenchanted society in the aftermath of promises of a better future which had been piled on thick by the authorities at the first multiparty elections in 1995. The first Kiswahili rap artistes of the 1990s who enjoyed true fame—Kwanza Unit, 2 Proud (who changed his name to Mister II), Hard Blasters—bequeathed to Kiswahili rap a strong civic and social role. This attitude brought the public closer to the Tanzanian actors of the hip-hop culture. These Old School artistes boosted political hip-hop just like the first American rappers. They drew their themes from daily realities faced by the urban youth.

The groups chosen for the study are those that eloquently relate the effects of a liberal economic policy that has been practiced since the 1990s. In 1995, the record *Wapi tunakwenda*²⁶¹ by 2 Proud expressed

²⁶⁰ Despite the quantities of arable land available in Tanzania, the agricultural revolution did not take off. This led some observers to the conclusion that *kilimo, uti wa mgongo uliosahaulika*—agriculture, the backbone which was willingly forgotten (cf. *Mtanzania*, 13/07/04).

²⁶¹ This song is from the album *Ni mimi*, released in 1995. Mister II, with eight albums to his

great anxiety about the future of the country. Below is an extract of the following song.

[...] Ni wapi tunakwenda ? (tu-tunakwenda)	Where are we going? (we are just going)
Shule namaliza Sina pa kujishikiza	I complete my education Nowhere to hold on to
Nabaki najiuliza Nitafanya kazi gani	I can only ask myself What work will I do?
Kwenye kila kampuni kazi haipatikani Heri kilimo ingekuwa ni nafuu	At every company, no job available It would be better to go into farming
Lakini pembejeo nazolewa bei juu Ila watoto wa wakuu Wanaopata kazi kupitia wazazi	But the required tools are very expensive Except for children of big men Who get jobs through their parents
Hii siyo sawa Kwao hiyo ni sawa	This isn't right But for them it's not a problem
Mungu ape nini labda gunia la chawa Na sasa naripoti	What can God can give me, perhaps a bag of lice And now I am reporting [...]

The meagre profits generated from the agriculture sector and the lack of jobs in towns foster the questioning of the youth that demands to know where they are headed. The high capital required does not encourage investment in income-generating farming. In town, some practice discrimination in workplace which favours children of the elitist government officials, political powers and wealthy businessmen.

The song *Ndani ya Bongo* released in 1996 by 2 Proud and Dolla Soul of the group De-Plow-Matz, testifies to a wind of liberty blowing over the economic capital soon after political and economic *uwazi*.²⁶² It also emphasises the freedom of morals peculiar to urban anonymity. “*Kila mmoja anacheza anavyoweza mimi ni mbongo*” (each person lives his life as he pleases, I am Tanzanian). The each-for-himself concept is situated in this urban jungle is “*Mimi niko ‘single’ lakini kelele kama utingo, ahaaa*”—I am single, but I say ahaaa (no!) to noise like a tout!

name, is the largest producer of rap music.

²⁶² Haas and Gesthuizen (2000, p. 281) in their article emphasized this word in a popular song by Mister II, *Ndani ya Bongo* (1996), in which he clearly states that Tanzania is an open country—*Kufanya unachotaka Bongo uwazi*—in reference to the move to a state controlled by a liberal economy. According to Haas and Gesthuizen, *uwazi* “is contributing to a new mode of living for many Tanzanian people” (p. 281).

This song underlines the same ceaseless strife for money. To be established in Dar es Salaam, one must be cunning; “*inakubidi uwe na Bongo*” and make use of one’s intelligence. 2 Proud uses the double meaning of the word ‘*bongo*’ which in Kiswahili slang²⁶³ means intelligence and in the context of the song, means Dar es Salaam. This mirror role of society is reinforced by the continued precariousness of the living conditions of a majority of Tanzanians. Famine is a scourge that threatens several villages every year. In the name of the famous invisible hand of free trade—*soko la huria*—the authorities abdicated from all responsibility faced with the successive increases of the price of fuel, foodstuff, the cost of inputs, the constant lowering of sale prices for raw materials etc. In order to deal with the most serious problems in the period of food insecurity, donors and NGOs are solicited each year. Their high contribution in the budget each year increases the government’s dependence on foreign donors.

Male-female relationships did not escape the dictatorship of money either. Sofia, in a song of the same title by Joni Woka and Ras Lion is loved by a young suitor, who has neither house nor car. The singers emphasise on the disintegration of the amorous links after economic pressure which the young generation faces. In the towns, young men are often heard expressing their distrust and disillusionment towards young girls who choose their partners by virtue of their economic situation. The song *Thamani ya Pesa* by Joni Woka and Ras Lion denounces a young girl who abandons her partner because of dissatisfaction with his financial situation. Other hip-hop singers expressed their sorrow at the sight of their ‘*dada*’, (sisters, meaning girls in general) who give over themselves to prostitution in order to survive. Secondary school students frequently accept sexual relations with the first man that displays his wealth, in exchange for “*chipsi, kuku, nyama choma*.”²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Referred to as *Kiswahili cha mtaani*, meaning the street language. The website www.darhotwire.com gives an interesting list of such words widely used by the youth, mainly living in urban areas. Mister II clarifies that before the spread of hip-hop in the country, each district of Dar es Salaam had its own slang (Temeke, Sinza, Kinondoni, etc. all had their own lingo). Since then, the music would have erased these differences by imposing a single ‘street-talk’. It concludes that music helped in uniting the citizens—*muziki inaunganisha watu*. However, the older generation qualifies the use of this street language as an inappropriate way to speak Kiswahili—*Kiswahili kibovu*.

²⁶⁴ A plate of roast meat and potato chips (cf. the song by Joni Wok and Ras Lion, *Ajira za Watoto*).

They thus expose themselves to the risk of unwanted pregnancies, to abortions in pitiable conditions and worse, to the risk of HIV infection. Joni Woka and Ras Lion as well as Mister II (in *Ajira za watoto* and *Mtoto wa mtaani* respectively) are saddened by the lot of numerous Tanzanian children who abandoned school benches for a life dedicated to the daily quest for a few shillings. This phenomenon is linked to the poverty that numerous families are at the brink of. Some of these children start earning a living very young, right from their early childhood.

Others are left to their own devices in the streets of towns after either being dumped by their parents or the death of their parents. The AIDS pandemic in Tanzania is affecting a high percentage of married couples, threatening the social fabric of society. In urban and rural areas, many children take part in remunerative activities. They work in commercial farms as the large tea plantations, in quarries, mines and in towns as domestic servants. The future of the country for these children and the Tanzanian youth is one of the major preoccupations expressed in Tanzanian rap. The country is still dependent on agriculture, which represents 49% of the GDP and employs about 80% of the population. The economic immobility particular to the countryside incites the young generation (both herders and farmers) to “*tafuta maisha*”²⁶⁵ in the towns or abroad. Such a situation is well narrated in, the song *Bitozi* by Joni Woka and Ras Lion. This song derides the suggestions of the *bitozi*²⁶⁶ who wants to leave the country for seeking fortune in Europe.

<i>We Bitoz wewe</i>	Hey you braggart
<i>Kuacha kujidanganya</i>	don't deceive yourself
<i>Kukimbilia Ulaya</i>	by running off abroad
<i>Tanzania hapa utawini</i>	you can earn money here in Tanzania
<i>Hata kama unalima nyanya</i>	even if you grow tomatoes
<i>Bora ujue unachokifanya [...]</i>	as long as you know what you are doing
<i>Kwa wazungu unalilia kwenda</i>	you would love to go to the White man's land
<i>Kiingereza yenyewe huwezi</i>	yet you can't even speak English
<i>Unaweza maneno mawili tu</i>	you are only acquainted with two words
<i>Yes no [...]</i>	yes – no

²⁶⁵ Settle down and live their lives.

²⁶⁶ Another example of street lingo, which according to Joni Woka, means a young person who is attracted to a life of luxury, yet does not like to work..

This desire to flee is symptomatic of a young generation that sees no future in its country. Discouraged by the difficulties of life and often worsened by illusions from B-rated American series on the national channel TV, ITV, a large section of the youth aspires to live abroad. Many attempt to go to closer destinations, for example South Africa. The most daring of these leave with some finances in the hope of selling their merchandise in a more lucrative market.

For a period of about 40 years, agricultural practices in the rural areas which are still very rudimentary, often, lack irrigation facilities and have worn out a majority of the small-scale farmers. The majority of peasant farmers rely on their subsistence and sometimes on cash-crop farming (coffee, sisal, tobacco) to cater for their needs.²⁶⁷ This chronic situation causes several young villagers to migrate in their masses to urban areas. This increases the number of *wamachinga* or petty traders each year, who are the main actors in a growing informal sector. In the towns, a consumer society plays its part in widening the gap between the *walalahoi*²⁶⁸ who live on less than a dollar-a-day, and the *matajiri*²⁶⁹ who pounce on the latest models of mobile phones. The group *Wagosi wa Kaya* have composed a song, *Simu ya mikononi*, on the theme of the cell phone, conquering a growing population all through the country.

The education public system does not ascertain a social promotion role within the peasant class. So many handicaps prevent to provide appropriate education: overcrowded primary school classrooms, lack of infrastructure, overworked and poorly-paid young teachers, often not paid for several months in succession. All this adds up to a poor picture of teaching conditions. The song *Walimu* by Joni Woka reminds the society of *hali ngumu* (difficult conditions) of teachers towards the *viongozi*—the political powers:

Wakitoka vyuoni ajira hakuna [...]

when their training is complete, there are no salaries

²⁶⁷ A small percentage of rich farmers invest in the growth of sugarcane, spices, tobacco, etc. Some of them have tractors, and can install an irrigation system to alleviate the chronic drought seasons.

²⁶⁸ The *walalahoi* belong to the class of the most deprived, the 'under-proletariat' (Maupeu, 2001, 185). With a GDP of USD 250 per inhabitant per year, Tanzania is one of the poorest countries on the world. 51% of the population lives below the world poverty line, placed at USD 1 per day, and 30% of the population live in absolute poverty.

²⁶⁹ The bourgeoisie. *Matajiri* literally means the rich.

Bila walimu viongozi wangetoka wapi
without teachers, from where would leaders have come?

Nauliza sasa mbona mnanyamaza [...]
I would like to know why you are silent now

The insufficient number of secondary schools in rural areas widens the gap between an urban area filled with the main public and private secondary schools,²⁷⁰ and the villages. Only *watoto wa wakuu* as emphasised by Mister II in his song *Ndani ya Bongo* seem to benefit from access to quality education in secondary schools and beyond.²⁷¹

Wagosi wa Kaya, in their song *Safari zetu* (our journeys), bears witness to the difficult and dangerous transport conditions in a country where road and rail infrastructure is barely developed and constitutes a serious handicap to the economic development of the country. While some major road routes are often renovated, a large proportion of the country has no tarmacked roads. *Safari zetu* is a legitimate complaint expressed by hip-hop artistes to denounce the lack of assistance by the authorities in an area where millions of citizens daily encounter insecurity on the roads, defective means of transport or in some cases, are completely deprived of these.²⁷² The song *Vituko uswahilini* by Suma G and his video clip ironically depicts the daily life in the poor quarters of Dar es Salaam. The video shows a child defecating in cramped courtyard of a makeshift house in the slums and in which people usually sit to eat their ugali, the main Tanzanian dish usually made from maize. After independence, the new leaders did not reconsider the territorial boundaries that had been demarcated in the colonial era. A geographic separation which is today still quite sharp distributed the Dar es Salaam population by virtue of its socio-economic status. The Uzunguni area is concentrated with the expatriate population. The residential estates referred to as Uhindini are populated by the merchant class

²⁷⁰ Some of these schools are international. Their registration fees are excessively high.

²⁷¹ The rate of access to secondary school in Tanzania is among the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa.

²⁷² Recently a government representative publicly announced that the government will continue to buy the famous *mashangini* (big luxurious four-wheel drive cars) (Tuki, 2001) in order to drive across the country. This sensational declaration caused several journalists to take offence at this political excess which involves spending millions in the purchase of luxury all-surface cars for the benefit of parliamentarians instead of immediately investing in, the construction of road infrastructure. See 'The so-called "good governance" with the exorbitant *shangini's* comfort in Bongoland' which appeared in *The Family Mirror* dated 29/06–05/07/04.

of Indian origin. The other small-income citizens are concentrated in the slum areas of Dar es Salaam or other towns, in areas referred to as Uswahilini.

The increased inequality in the Tanzanian society is a theme often discussed by hip-hop artistes. In their songs, *wazungu* or *wageni* are perceived as rich foreigners and the only beneficiaries of the country's economy. It is a fact that the wave of privatisation often benefits foreign investors.²⁷³ The duo Joni Woka and Ras Lion in one of the songs from their last album *Fasihi*²⁷⁴ *question why a country endowed with natural riches and other economic assets consistently remains one of the poorest in the world.*

[...] Nchi yetu nzuri imejaa upendo na amani
Our wonderful country, filled with love and peace

Sasa mbona utajiri wanachukua wageni
Why is it that wealth belongs to the visitors

Majumba mazuri na magari ya kifahari wanamiliki wageni
Palaces and luxury vehicles are in the hands of foreigners

Halafu wanatuita sisi maskini [...]
And then they refer to us as beggars

This clientelism practised by the government gave fodder to discourse by extremist nationalists.²⁷⁵ In order to remove the society's resentment towards privatisation policies, the government undertook to recruit one of the major hip-hop personalities to promote the well-founded nature of privatisation in Tanzanian society. The article 'Rap star signs up to privatization' available on the internet (www.255flevour.8k.com) explains that the government recruited "[...] *one of the country's leading rap artists Mr. Ebbo to boost a publicity campaign that extols virtues of privatisation. The campaign, by the Tanzanian authorities, aims to educate the public about the benefits of private ownership as*

²⁷³ Since Mkapá's presidency, one of the largest sources of foreign investment comes from South African entrepreneurs. Their entry into the Tanzanian market through buying up private businesses, partnership with state-owned companies, providers of supermarket goods among others is supported by the leading authorities.

²⁷⁴ This was released at the beginning of 2004. The song is called *Kwa nini?* The word *fasihi* is a literature term, rarely used in spoken language. According to the singers, it indicates the different art elements which are present in their last album (*vitu vyote vipo ndani ya usanii*), which is aimed at entertaining educating and challenging (*kuburudisha, kufundisha na kuonya*).

²⁷⁵ Cf Bancet, 2004.

the privatisation process in the East African country nears its end.” Mr. Ebbo then played the role of political recuperation by composing rap which “is explaining why it makes sense to privatise the railway system. He asks whether it’s better to let it die in public hands or revitalise it by leasing to investors.” The choice of this singer by the authorities is not insignificant. According to the article “Mr. Ebbo, otherwise known as Abel Loshilaa Motika is a Maasai warrior/rapper. He is an imposing figure in his traditional garb and he has a political, social and economic conscience.”

It is less certain if this sensitisation really changed the society’s general opinion on the issue of privatization. The publishing of a UNDP report confirms that the citizens quite clearly comprehend that the buying up of formerly state-owned corporations or investments in certain sectors such as minerals, electricity, petroleum and gas are opportunities essentially seized by foreign investors whose aim is to increase their personal wealth.²⁷⁶ On its part, government accords to investors duty exemptions for a period of five years in order to attract these investors. It is in such an ossified political and economic climate that hip-hop artistes in Tanzania invented a popular language destined to educate and raise the citizens’ awareness. As privileged witnesses to a worrying social and economic evolution of the country, some artistes paint a realistic picture of the Tanzanian society. Their detachment from politics lends them an unequalled freedom of speech that is rare within the general society. While these singers create awareness of the economic misery that equally affects urban and village populations, some go further to denounce the government’s indifference and misappropriation of funds.

Political and civic rap

Socialist propaganda supported by authoritarian practices whose aim was to set apart the enemies of the Tanzanian nation does not create a favourable playing field for the formation of an area of free expression within the masses. The Nyerere regime therefore blocked a politicization

²⁷⁶ See the article in *Mwananchi* 18/07/04: “Uzawa wageuka ajenda ya migogoro duniani. Wazalendo wahisi kutengwa. Umoja Mataifa watafuta suluhisho.” Indigenisation is a highly contested issue in the international community. The local people are feeling isolated, the international community seeks a solution.

of the society. What changes did the opening up of the economy and country politics bring to this lack of political awareness? Benjamin Mkapa's accession to power in 1995 did not mark a true severing from the policies of the socialist regime. Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), which had won the first multiparty elections, was only an heir to the ideology of the TANU, the Nyerere's party that had led the country to independence. Consequently, this political continuity did not result in any changes in the relationship between citizens and politics. Only new elites took over the reins of the economy and political power.

Since his accession to power, the Mkapa government does not always encourage citizen participation in the political and economic life of the country. They are asked to cope with the good and the evil, just like in the past, social consequences of economic decisions made by the ruling authorities. The authorities consider only the members of parliament and the local representatives are allowed to participate in politics in the country.²⁷⁷ At the slightest provocation, the military is called in to subdue all forms of protest. An example can be drawn from April 2004, when the students at Dar es Salaam University protested the passing of a new law on the financing of higher education. The Students Loan Board Act now obliges students to take loans to pay for their university education. On Tuesday, 20 April 2004, the field forces were called in to suppress the student demonstrations. At the beginning of June 2004, President Mkapa ratified this law.

The leaders of the opposition parties in Tanzania did not engage in constructive political debate. The opposition is no great threat to the political colossus, the CCM. Some people believe multipartyism is only an "*apparatus for creating space for those who could not get room in the single party*."²⁷⁸ Whatever the case, the democratisation process has not led to a true politicization of the society. Power abuse is a prevalent theme in Kiswahili rap. It denounces Tanzanian politics, which have been tainted by corruption. The omnipresent corruption in the society is criticized in the songs *Traffic*, which talks about road traffic; *Ndani ya Mahakaman*, meaning in the courtrooms; and *Vinatia Chungu*, meaning what a shame (songs by Wagosi wa Kaya). In these songs, the rappers depict daily practices which consist of paying off traffic policemen

²⁷⁷ Cf. 'Why Tanzanian democracy is sailing through rough sea', *The Family Mirror* 13/07–19/07/04.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

when buses are stopped for being overloaded or for overspeeding. The songs also rail against the damaging environment in many offices in the country.²⁷⁹

Sexual harassment in offices is a common occurrence. The fear of losing one's job at any time without compensation and the meagre possibilities for recourse to justice increases these abuses in the workplace. Private companies and public institutions are sometimes headed by members of the same family, people from a certain region or from the same ethnic group. Corruption practices such as the offer for money, sex and food happens at all levels of society as food and financial insecurity are problems affecting a large majority of the country. At political level, opinions are conspicuously missing from political electoral life in Tanzania. At each electoral meeting, gifts—kangas, caps, tee-shirts, money—are freely dished out, with the aim of 'buying' votes from the citizens.

The hit song *Ndio mzee* by Prof. Jay derides the attitude of the candidates who during their campaigns habitually make many promises, which they do not later fulfil. The singer plays the part of a politician who promises the world, for example "*milk running out of home taps, bar maids driving Mercedes Benz, and cars that fly!*"²⁸⁰ The chorus in this song has been used during the last presidential elections by a majority of politicians as a local jingle during their drives and speeches to amuse and attract voters among the youth.²⁸¹ Envelopes would have already begun to be discreetly distributed for the next general elections in 2005 according to some journalists and opposition candidates. This is in the political arena as well as among businesses and high-ranking economic actors. Such practices do not augur well for an alternative political setup after the elections. In this context of a regime with barely democratised processes, some artistes have taken the high ground, and loudly declare what the society thinks but does not voice. The society is

²⁷⁹ "*Mimi sikuajiriwa kwa kufoji vyeti, wanaofanya hivyo ndiyo hao hao wanafiki, wanafiki [...] wamekuwekea kitu, unajua nini roho zao za kutu [...] wanasababisha mpaka unafukuzwa kazi [...] Khoo! sitapiki, naeleza ukweli na siyo unafiki, [...] ujumbe wangu umefika*"—I was not recruited using a fake CV, those who behave in this manner are hypocrites, they pass something on to you (alludes to witchcraft) and cause you to lose your job. Ah! I am not vomiting, I am telling the truth and it's not hypocrisy. (Extract from a song by Wagosi wa Kaya).

²⁸⁰ Cf 'Why Professor Jay matters in Tanzania?', *The Entertainer* (date unknown).

²⁸¹ Ibid.

barricade behind a wall of silence which is the result of intimidation by the authorities and their refusal to be involved in political debate. The low level of education and the difficult access to information are also reasons for the slow rate of the citizens' political emancipation.

A separate group of musicians raises the alarm on the fragile peace situation in the country. Tanzania would soon lose its status as a haven of peace in a continent torn apart by civil wars. Mister II in his song *Wapi tunakwenda* expresses himself as a visionary. The youth have no jobs; those who cover kilometre after kilometre every day to sell their wares in the streets of the economic capital in order to quell their hunger, the fate of most of the *wamachinga*, are singled out:

*Vijana tunadunda
Nakwenda kama nunda
Tunakwenda wapi
(ch: Sijui!)
Amani itatushinda*

Youth are bouncing along
Stepping like gangs
Where are we going
I don't know
We couldn't maintain peace

Others, non artistes, share the same view about the country and its future. In the words of a merchant from Central Africa, Tanzania is a time-bomb.

The artistes therefore play the role of denouncer, accuser and safeguard of a society that can no longer see the dysfunctions plaguing it. They act as reporters and silence breakers. Civic and political rap is expressed through FM waves, aimed at criticizing or mobilizing the collective conscience in a language understood by all. Mangesho refers to these artistes as the new political organs of society.²⁸² According to his research, some songs were indirectly censored by radio programmers who are the media windows of the ruling authorities. In 2002, the songs considered most subversive towards the government were banned from being aired from a radio station managed by the state radio RTD (Mangesho, 2003: 111). It played Bongo Flava “*but under scrutiny of the government.*”

Consequently, the government would condemn the singers perceived as being most politically aware. The lyrics chanted by rappers would not conform to the norms and values of the Tanzanian people

²⁸² Mangesho (2003, p. 180) “BF (Bongo Flava) artists are playing the role of what he calls the social elites, the organic intellectuals. [...] BF is a «cultural movement that is a direct product of city life... fundamental form of praxis.”

(Mangesho, 2003). This negation is worrisome as it veers towards increased control of freedom of expression. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) recently announced that it was banning rap in the country.²⁸³ This censorship occurred during a period of deep political crisis. Nevertheless, as it was officially practiced in DRC or in the less strict manner in Tanzania, censorship of the artistic arena is an alarming indicator of the curbing of freedom of expression and the state of the country's political health. Tanzanian singers have embarked on the task of writing rap that was social in nature. Some directly have attacked the attitude of silence which prevailed in the Tanzania society by explicitly denouncing the political drift.

Through the success of hip-hop artistes, Tanzania is living a process of unrivalled awareness and politicization. What citizens refused to openly declare is verbalized by the youth whose have seized of a speech tool which benefits a national impact. The same is done with education on the AIDS virus. How does one express what the society still considers inexpressible? Rappers with a civic responsibility creatively express themselves in lyrics that are used to sensitize the youth on the pandemic which is growing at an alarming rate in Tanzania. *Starehe* by Prof. Jay and Ferouz depicts a young man infected with the AIDS virus. He cries out in despair, “*ninaaoo*” (I have it). He addresses the doctor who advises him not to give up. In response, the young Tanzanian tells him not to encourage him about his remaining days; “*dokta usinipe moyo...!*”

This encourages the populace to speak more openly about the fear of the illness. Thanks to their eloquence, several artistes substitute for the government that is embarrassingly absent in the health sectors and in the sensitisation of AIDS in rural areas. Since acceding to power, its failure to help the Tanzanian people creates resentment and at the same time, is the cause of a new arena of highly effective popular expression. Strong links have been established between hip-hop artistes and the society. At the same time, the commercial recovery of hip hop set off hard-hitting reactions among the artists. Some declared war on amateur rappers who would lack originality and would be far removed from civic or political rap or even the hip-hop philosophy by composing a sort of *katuni* rap.

²⁸³ See the article in *Rai* (1–7 July, 2004) ‘Muziki wa rap sasa wapigwa marufuku-Kinshasa, DRC’.

Artistes' involvement in the defence and maintenance of authentic hip-hop rap

The bulk of commercial rap music worries the politically-inclined artistes. Recently, Afande Sele,²⁸⁴ the new talent in Kiswahili rap, expressed the rappers' discontent with insignificant lyrics, mainly on love themes. Called Bongo Flava stars, these artists benefit from the support of several radio sponsors, the press and private businesses. As a whole, they are assured of a huge radio and television promotion. Afande Sele's song *Mtazamo* in collaboration with Solo Thang and Prof Jay highlights the decline of social and political Kiswahili rap as victim of its own success. All manner of abuses take place to keep one at the top of the crop. Young girls who hope to go into music participate in *rushwa ya ngono* which is corruption through prostitution. Others merely reproduce earlier hits.

According to Mister II, radio orients its listeners' tastes by taking on huge promotional campaigns to assure the success of artistes who have the means to play into the corruption game. This business machine has been running for several years. However, resistance to this explosion of empty rap is building up. As an example, in December 2004, a 'Hip-hop Summit' was launched in order to revive the spirit of hip-hop and to discuss about different critical issues among the hip hop community as employment, professionalism and business skills in hip hop, music piracy, intellectual property rights, copyright law in Tanzania, sales and distribution, the conflicts between hip hop artists, the media role and the role of music artists in prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Some artistes have tried to redefine hip-hop in the face of being bombarded with Bongo Flava dominated by softer themes such as love or stories (*hadithi*) which move way from daily reality. Afande Sele finds this trend annoying, as he shows in his songs which criticise this generation of rappers who are more attracted by celebrity status and the desire to make money than by a real gift (*kipaji*) of educating the community on the problems of contemporary society (*kuelimisha jamiii*). He redefined the role of the artiste in society through several titles which have led to him being one of the most popular rappers. In

²⁸⁴ He won a Toyota, which was the prize for Mfalme wa Rhymes. This competition was held at the beginning of April 2004 in the Diamond Jubilee Hall.

the title *Darubini kali* the artiste presents himself as a visionary. *Mayowe* expresses his refusal to let Tanzanian rap transmute into insignificant and commercial rap.

Hivyo ukiharibu Rap lazima n'takuchukia [...]
so if you'll destroy rap I have to hate you

Kelele za mashabiki, zikumvibishe kichwa ukajiona mwanamuziki [...]
the noise of the fans shouldn't make you proud and make you think you are a musician

Hip-hop actors require better conditions in order to create good music. For example, their songs are subjected to heavy pirating. Although authors' rights have been written up and passed by parliament, these do not prevent misappropriation by some distribution houses which commercialise Bongo Flava compilations without assent and consultation of the selected groups. They neither consult nor get assent from the featured groups. Interviews revealed that the lack of solidarity between artistes has resulted in powerlessness to prosecute these violations of rights. Hip-hop in Tanzania has experienced an unprecedented boom by being listened to by a considerable population. The youth are a majority all over the Africa, thus amounting to a substantial number. What weight will this music have in the coming years? Faced with diverse problems of AIDS, corruption, unemployment and non-participation of the people in policy-making, what changes can hip-hop hope to achieve? Will it transmute into soft and apolitical messages or will it strengthen its vocation as a popular tool for political, social and civic sensitisation within society? Will the determination of some artistes to reawaken consciousness defend and perpetuate a social and political Swahili rap?

Conclusion

Hip-hop is a global culture which transcends geographical borders to embrace complex and diverse socio-economic realities in the world. It is a transcultural phenomenon. In constant interaction with society, hip-hop aims at passing on a message and emotions. Its recent entry into new societies as in Africa was an explosion of its form and content. Some see in this a simple effect of globalisation, while others speak more positively of multiculturalism. In Africa, hip-hop has reversed the

trend which prevailed in several African countries where authoritarian regimes took over from the colonisers. In Tanzania, before *uwazi*, the culture generally acceded to the desires of the new authorities. It was transformed into a tool of political propaganda.

Since the 1990s, with the hip-hop culture, new political organs representing the popular classes emerged. A merger between the greater public and the artists was reinforced due to an improvement in recording conditions and the development of the music industry. Where hip-hop initially clashed with the Nyerere generation, this position has radically changed. The involvement of artistes determined to denounce and proclaim the evils affecting the Tanzania society brought the wider public closer to hip-hop. Political, cultural and social hip-hop forces give a reflection of the youth, and reveal the actual stakes and negotiations which are taking place among African societies.

The first anthropologists in Africa emphasised the wealth of oral African literature; today, a different direction is taken. Hip-hop is effective in granting a social representation of contemporary society. A study of the relationship between contemporary music and politics opens the door to a better understanding of these societies. The entry-point is that hip-hop is valued by those oriented towards non-occidental societies, which are undermined by social, cultural and economic crises. It is a major social and political theme, carrying major problem issues which must not be forgotten by the social science research community.

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The enduring power of Somali “oral political poetry”: songs and poems of peace in the midst of chaos

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A study of ‘oral political poetry’ in the context of a war-torn society, such as the Somali one, runs the risk of focusing only on its expression of violence and hatred. Since Somalia has been living in a state of lawlessness for the past 14 years, poetic compositions which are a call to take up arms have often been presented as being most representative of Somali culture. Doubtless, the figure of the Sayiid, Mahamad Abdille Hassan, the most renowned Somali poet, who fought fiercely against the British colonial powers between 1900 and 1920 has contributed to this view. A national hero for some but a villain for others²⁸⁵, many a poem he wrote was to rally his clansmen to the war against the *gaal* (infidels) and to pour scorn over his enemies. Although he also composed poems of love and compassion²⁸⁶, the one where he expressed his jubilation at the death of his enemy, the British Commanding Officer Scofield, *Geeridi Koofil* is one of the best-known pieces of Somali poetry. In the following of an already existing tradition, ‘political oral poetry’ today is more likely to sing the virtues of peace and reconciliation with the

²⁸⁵ Since Mohammad Abdille Hassan fought against some of the Somali clans who rallied to the cause of the British, like the Issaq, he was not a popular figure among them. Nevertheless, he became a national figure after independence and a statue was erected in his honour in the middle of Mogadishu. However, after the civil war, his statue was toppled by the insurgents since he belonged to the same clan as the President Syad Barre and had come to symbolise the harshness of the repression.

²⁸⁶ *Prayer for Maryam* is a poem he composed to ask God to relieve one of his wives from her suffering, quoted in, B.W. Andrzejewski with Sheila Andrzejewski, *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 46.

warring parties, than calling them to take up arms. In a dismantled country with a destroyed infrastructure, and which has had no a central government to speak of for the past 14 years, oral poetry is showing a capacity to provide an adaptable form to carry messages for the society at large, after the usual communication channels of the nation-state have ceased to exist and when many of its inhabitants have been scattered throughout the world.

The term 'oral political poetry' here refers to compositions which deal with issues concerning the life of the community at large. Contrasted with love poetry which is of a more individualistic nature, oral political poetry expresses in verse opinions about current issues which can range from praises of one's local or national hero to curses against one's enemy. This could be interspersed with satires of individual leaders or groups as well as laments about current hardships. In societies where the written word was sparse, political oral poetry has always played an important role, taking the place of the newspaper in more literate societies, as stated by Ruth Finnegan. The facility of transmission of oral verses, which has been enhanced by the development of modern technology, has brought oral political poetry into the 21st century. It is not surprising then that the current Somali tragedy would see a flourishing of poetry in a culture which has always been prolific in the production of verse. Voices at the beginning of the war may have expressed a desire for revenge,²⁸⁷ but the over-riding theme has been to denounce the violence and call for reconciliation. In this task, women have played a prominent role, and this essay will quote extensively their compositions since their importance is not always well documented.²⁸⁸

As this paper examines the function of poetry, it will not be restricted to a specific genre. It does not seem necessary here, for example to differentiate between poems and songs. As acknowledged by Johnson William Johnson, an attempt to do so would be a difficult task. He

²⁸⁷ A well-known poem of Geelle Ismaacil Macallin, using a traditional poetic form, calls for the extermination of the Darood, the clan of the President, quoted in a French translation, by Mohamed Abdi Mohamed, *Apocalypse*, Encres noires, Montélimar, 1994, p. 18.

²⁸⁸ The most interesting essay written in English about women's poetry is probably that of Zainab Mohamed Jama, 'Fighting to be heard: Somali's Poetry' in *African Languages and Cultures* 4 (1): 43-53, 1991. Several books have chapters where Somali women's poetry is quoted. They will be mentioned throughout this essay.

depicts this in his study of the Somali poetic composition, the *heelloy*.²⁸⁹ *All Somali poems are at least chanted and the English word 'song' can cover categories which would come under different names in Somali. The main differentiation that most Somali scholars make when it comes to poetry is based on the length of the verses and the rules of alliteration. The tendency is to consider the longer versions as poems and the shorter ones as songs. A mention of two of the most well known poetic genres will suffice: the gabay and the buraambur. The gabay, the preferred genre of the Sayid, is almost synonymous with poetry since the word for poet is gabayaa. The buraambur is a genre practiced by women. Yet what retains our attention is the 'oral' character of these compositions, oral referring here to their mode of transmission. The impact of the poetic messages is under study here and what matters is that the receiver would be an audience rather than a readership. This guarantees that it can reach the Somali society at large, literate or illiterate, no matter where they are.*

The Somali crisis: a political milieu favourable to the spoken word

The causes of the Somali crisis and especially the reason for its longevity are a matter of great debate today with diverse opinions beyond the scope of this paper. The few events that will be recalled are those that led to the disintegration of the Somali state in order to present a better picture of the milieu where the present production of oral poetry is taking place.

In January 1991, the government of President General Syad Barre was overthrown by a coalition of forces which comprised members of varied groups of the opposition, who took over the control of the capital city, Mogadishu. Syad Barre had seized power after a coup d'état in 1969 instigated by a group of officers who chose him as their official leader. They started a socialist revolution which was applauded at the time, by the majority of the population. However, the figure head gradually took

²⁸⁹ Johnson, John William, "*heelloy*" *Modern Poetry and Songs of the Somali*, Haan Publishing, London, 1996, p. xix.

on more power and became a dictator. After the defeat in 1977 in the war waged against the Ethiopians, his regime was faced with a rising opposition. It became progressively repressive and used clan politics to stay in power. Thus, the opposition that had initially come mainly from clans of the Northern regions was joined by others who had been left out of the circle of power, or worse, had been the victims of a brutal repression. When General Syad Barre was overthrown, his opponents could not agree on how to share power. As one of the main groups began to split and fight for the control of Mogadishu, the groups from the Northern region opted to secede and proclaim their own state.²⁹⁰ After some internal fighting, they were able to create a stable region, which, at the writing of this paper, has yet to be recognised as an independent state by the international community.

The rest of the country was engulfed in chaos as the troops of Syad Barre re-grouped and re-acquired part of the country (around Baidoa and the Juba valley) before being chased away from the Somali territory in 1992. The result of so much fighting was a terrible famine which put Somalia on every TV screen in the world. This eventually led to the intervention of American troops under a UN mandate to protect the foods convoys of which were hijacked by different gangs of young armed militia. After the killing of American soldiers caught up in an angry crowd, the US pulled out and the UN mission folded soon after. Somalia then was left to its devices, the fate of its people depending on who controlled the area where they lived. Those in control were warlords, traditional elders, *sharia* courts, businessmen, NGOs (local or international) or any combination of those. The proliferation of weapons and the collapse of the industry caused the many idle young men (*mooriyan* in Somali) who lived in the cities and roamed the neighbourhoods to resort to banditry as a way of life. In the absence of a police force, private armed militia were hired by the different groups

²⁹⁰ At Independence, the Somali territory was under the rule of mainly two powers—the British in the North but also further South, in the region of what is now Northern Kenya, and the Italian in the South. They were also two other regions which were under colonial rule. These were the Ogaden which came under Ethiopian rule, and Djibouti, under French rule. When the people from the North, in 1991, coming mainly from the Issaq clan, declared themselves an independent state, they claimed as borders, the borders of the former British Protectorate.

to protect their life and their goods, or even to enforce the decisions of the *sharia* courts. They were however, chiefly hired to assert one's power over an area.

Since 14 international peace efforts have failed to provide any long term solution,²⁹¹ the prevailing situation is one of instability and unpredictability. A region can be very peaceful until conflict arises between individuals or groups for a variety of reasons—business deals gone sour, cattle theft, unfair distribution of humanitarian aid, or even private vendetta, all resulting in the killing of a few people. The area then enters a cycle of violence with more killings to avenge the deaths, until, under pressure from members of the civil society such as local NGOs or/and women's organizations, a group of elders are called upon to intervene and start the process of reconciliation. Once in a while, bigger movements occur when a warlord, having found allies in neighbouring countries which provide him with money and weapons, tries to invade an area. In this case, the fighting becomes more like a confrontation between two armies. However, violence in general occurs on a smaller scale.

Yet despite the collapse of national institutions, anarchy as the total absence of organised structure does not describe adequately the situation on the ground. Both old and new structures have come to the forefront to fill the vacuum left by the absence of government. The resurgence of the clan as a basic unit around which the life of the society is organised today is of great importance. Nevertheless, it can give the wrong impression if one thinks of the clan as a rigid structure. Business interests cut across clans, and individuals move freely in and out of their clan of origin. Even members of the same militia do not necessarily belong to the same clan or to the clan of their 'employer'. They are simply mercenaries who hire themselves to whoever is willing to pay them. In the business world of Mogadishu, one can find members of all clans represented, if only for protection. A single clan might serve as an umbrella under which individuals of other clans operate. In the Somalia of today, alliances are the rule and no grouping is ever permanent.

The same thing can be said of the contours of the territories or

²⁹¹ At the time of writing, a peace conference organised by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was on-going in Kenya. It started in October 2003 and has entered its 3rd phase.

fiefdoms that are controlled by warlords²⁹² and who have come to replace any notion of national or regional boundaries. A territory can be loosely defined as an area that a group claims as its own with the right to collect taxes at a point of entrance (always at gun point) but supposedly as a counterpart to the protection of the people who live within its borders. The warlord's ability to control a territory depends largely on whether or not he can pay the armed militia of young men he has hired. For this reason, as the economic fortunes of the warlords change, so does the extent of their territory. However, in regions where the civil society has power and agreements can be made, a territory can find substantial stability as the case of the creation of Puntland has shown. Thus, the north-eastern part of Somalia declared itself an autonomous region in 1998.²⁹³

On the other hand, along with the clan, another type of structure has mushroomed, gravitating around the NGO structure. The NGO, a definitely imported model, has become an indispensable structure for receiving funding from the International Community in most countries in Africa. In Somalia, it has acquired a special importance as in the absence of a government it is the only channel through which foreign aid can be channelled.²⁹⁴ NGOs can then be found in the breakaway Republic of Somaliland which has not received international recognition as well as many other parts of Somalia. The more traditional structures such as age group, women's group, professional organisations which come under the larger term of civil society adopt a form which resembles or comes under the more general category of NGO. Even

²⁹² The status of the warlord is ambiguous when it relates to the clan. The warlord is identified by his clan affiliation but is not considered the leader of the clan; the traditional elder still is. Yet, because the warlord has the power of the gun, the traditional elder can do little to control him. It is unfortunate that the International Community, when it organizes a peace conference, gives legitimacy to warlords by inviting them, rather than the elders, to the negotiating table. The difficulty that the on-going peace conference in Nairobi has encountered, can be largely attributed by the clout that they were given at the beginning of the conference

²⁹³ After lengthy meetings, a new region was created which was set up with its own constitution and government. As opposed to Somaliland, it did not claim to create a new State but rather an 'autonomous' region.

²⁹⁴ Unfortunately the policy of the European Union and of many other individual countries is not to give funding to Somali NGOs directly. They only fund international NGOs, which sometimes redistribute it to local NGOs. Since I worked for an international NGO, the MCC (Mennonite Central Committee), we often served as intermediaries between the local NGOs and the International Community

the clan is grafted onto the NGO structure particularly so in the south where an NGO needs some kind of protection if it is to handle any amount of money, distribute goods, do any relief or development work. The NGOs offers to the Somali society a new space for gathering in the numerous workshops it organises. These become a forum for ideas to be discussed and also for poetry to be recited.

Due to its fluidity and the instability, the actual political milieu of Somalia creates a situation where constant negotiations between groups are necessary, be it to re-establish a fragile peace, negotiate new alliances or delimit territories. It has thus reinstated the spoken word as the favoured mode of communication. In today's Somalia there are no **written** rules²⁹⁵: no national archives, no government agencies to deliver property titles, birth certificates, diplomas or anything of the sort, nor any central bank to guarantee the authenticity of currency. As Abdulkadir Khalif explained in a recent article published in the Kenyan newspaper the *Daily Nation*, "*Forgers at the Abdalaa-shideeye 'documentation centre' run off state and municipal documents, including title deeds, at the snap of a finger.*"²⁹⁶ The spoken word again becomes the only guarantee of validity in any transaction. Millions of dollars change hands without any receipt or signature—the identity of the giver and the receiver is all the security needed. This is where clan affiliations play a vital role. If the individual does not pay up, his clan will be responsible for the debt. In the face of State disintegration, the oral mode of communication is proving to be the most valuable heritage of the Somali culture.

Oral political poetry: an unbroken continuum

The centrality of the spoken word does not mean that the written word had not found an important place in Somali society. Whatever the opinion one has about the Syad Barre era, one of its accomplishments

²⁹⁵ Save of course, for the *sharia* laws, which explain why *sharia* courts have been set up in different places to enforce some kind of law and order. But its efficiency depends on the armed militia or private police that is attached to it to enforce its judgments. When the community cannot agree to pay them, the *sharia* court collapses.

²⁹⁶ *The East African* (Nairobi) OPINION 5 April, 2004, posted to the web 7 April, 2004.

is to have transcribed the Somali language in 1972, adopting roman characters, and thus putting an end to a long-standing controversy. Since their independence, the Somali people had squabbled over the choice of the script so they could stop using the two languages of their former colonisers: Italian and English. The most vocal were those who wanted to use Arabic characters,²⁹⁷ arguing that Latin characters were the characters of the infidels. (For more on this, see Mohamed Osman Omar, *The road to Zero*).²⁹⁸ The writing down of the Somali language was received with great enthusiasm and apart from allowing the country to enter into a nation-wide literacy programme, it opened up a new venue to the creativity of the Somali literary composer. It saw the apparition of a very popular genre. This was in the form of serialised short stories, published every week in the national newspaper *Xiddigta Oktoobar*. Today, in the various newspapers published in Somalia²⁹⁹, such as the *Xog-Ogaal* of Mogadishu, stories in serial form are still published once or twice a week. A literary genre which starts by the *qabtay* (chapter) number and finishes by the mention *waa socotaa* (to be continued), its popularity is attested to by the fact that it has today found its place on the web.³⁰⁰ During the first years of the civil war, all government institutions were looted, and official written documents in the hands of the *mooriyan* became a valueless piece of paper, only good for starting a fire or wrapping up food...

Yet when it comes to poetry, it is fair to say that the written word in Somali never replaced the oral mode of dissemination. The Somalis discovered very early on that modern technology could enhance their way of life rather than destroy it. Contrary to what happened later in the choice of characters for writing down the Somali language, there was no controversy over the use of the radio. The British started broadcasting news in the Somali language as early as 1943.

The radio provided the Somalis with what was both a need and a taste—information. For a nomadic people who had to gather information about faraway places before moving people and cattle, the

²⁹⁷ Some also wanted to use characters invented by a Somali Osman Yusuf Kenadid and whose alphabet was called after his name, Osmanya.

²⁹⁸ Mohamed Osman Omar, *The Road to Zero*, Haan Associates, London, 1992.

²⁹⁹ Except in Somaliland, which publishes on newspaper print the ones published in other parts of Somalia are letter-size printed copies stapled together.

³⁰⁰ Such a site can be found with the heading *Wargeyska : Aaya Nolasha*.

ubiquity of the radio was an opportunity to know the state of things (*nabad mya?* is it peaceful?) in faraway places. The popularity of the BBC Somali News is well known and it is as high today as in the past. It could even be more popular now that Somalis are scattered all over the world. Radio emissions have become the daily unavoidable rendezvous throughout the entire community. The importance of communication for Somalis is illustrated by the fact that although it does not have a functioning government, Somalia has the cheapest communication system throughout eastern Africa.³⁰¹

The radio introduced the Somalis to a technology which allowed them to perform and disseminate poetry. This by-passed the need for writing it down both before and after 1972. It saw the development of new literary genres and songs such as the *hello* explained by John William Johnson. In the 1950s, the broadcasted patriotic songs helped the Somalis to rally to the cause of independence. Some of the most best known songs are *Soomaliyeye toosoo* composed by Cali Mire Cawale in 1946. The first verses of this song are as follows:

Soomaliyeye toosoo
Toose isku tiirsada ey
Habda kiina taag daremey
taaagera waligiin ey

Somali arise
 arise and unite
 the one who is weak
 may you help him

Another song that gained enough popularity to have its melody taken as the signature tune of Radio Muqdisho was *Dhulkayga, dhulkayga*.

Dhulkayga, dhulkayga
 Our country, our country

Dhulkayga, dhulkayga
 our country, our country

Wow Dhimanaya, dhulkayga
 we will die for our country

Dhallin iyo dhallan, waayeelka dhursugay
 The youth and the children, the elders who waited for a long time

Dhallin iyo dhallan, waayeelka dhursugay
 The youth and the children, the elders who waited for a long time

³⁰¹ It cost 50 US cents per minute to call from Somalia to anywhere in the world when a phone call from France, for example was 3 US \$ a minute.

Wow wada dhannoo, wow wada dhannoo
we are all united for it, we are all united for it

Wow dhimanaynaa, dhulkayga
we will die for our country³⁰²

After independence, the radio kept on being a powerful mean of propaganda to carry messages to the population, especially when the government started a wide programme of literacy. It was then that the poem of Abdillahi Qarshi became the signature tune of Radio Mogadishu whose first line is a well-known proverb:

Aqoon wa la'aani wa iftiin wa laa'ane
Without knowledge there is no light

Waa aqal iyo ilays la'aane
no home, no life

Ogaada ogaada dugSyada ogaada
Care for the schools, care for them

oo ogaada, oo ogaada
O do care for them

walaalaya, oo adaa
And brothers, go to school

However, as the technology of communication developed, Somalis later adopted audio-cassettes which became very important during the dictatorship of Syad Barre who had taken over the radio and censored its use. Poets such as Mohamed Ibrahim Warsame 'Hadrawi', were jailed because of the poems they composed. These poems were understood as criticism of the government. The prohibited poems and songs then circulated in the underground. Ali Jimale goes as far as saying that they played a prominent role in the fall of Syad Barre, "*Barre was not in a position to control the widely popular audio-cassettes which dominated the markets... It was a wry sense of this media-fueled decline which led to the defection of prominent supporters of the regime between 1980-1989.*"³⁰³ Today, image and sound have further enhanced communication for people who are dispersed across the continents. Video recordings are used to keep in touch with the diaspora; important family events are

³⁰² Johnson, John William, "heelloy" *Modern Poetry and Songs of the Somali*, Haan Publishing, London, 1996, p. 88-89.

³⁰³ Ahmed, Ali Jimale, *Daybreak Is Near* p. 131. The Red Sea Press, Inc. 1996.

recorded and then send to members of the family.³⁰⁴ Video-cassettes can fulfil a more immediate need. For Somali NGOs that receive funding from foreign organisations, written reports are tedious and difficult to do. As foreigners are sometimes reluctant to travel into Somalia to supervise projects, video recordings of food distribution and other activities such as workshop are made as proof to the donor agency that the events took place.³⁰⁵

Peace making and poetry

Besides creating a milieu which has enhanced the importance of the oral mode of communication, the instability of the political situation in Somalia has paradoxically increased the activity of peace-making and conflict resolution. For a largely nomadic population that considers conflicts as inevitable³⁰⁶, peace-making has always been important. The backbone of its system was the group of the elders who acted as official peace-makers, and the paying of the blood price to compensate for the loss of lives. Women also played an important role in the peace-making process. Since the Somalis practice exogamy, the women were used as emissaries to the clan of either their husband or father. They also played a more passive and less pleasant role as part of the 'bargain' made between the clans to ensure reconciliation. This bears similarities to the treaties in Europe between the royal families in the 16th and 17th century.

³⁰⁴ I went to a wedding feast in Mogadishu in 2000 which had all the trappings of the traditional wedding feasts—women in their best gold, poets singing praises to the clan of the bridegroom and bridesmaid, a the beat of the drum, Somali songs with a group accompanied with an electric piano... The only people missing were the bride and the groom, who were in Washington but the whole feast was recorded on a video-cassettes which would be sent to them.

³⁰⁵ I saw the most creative use of the video camera in a recent program of demobilization conducted by the Somali organisation Saacid in Mogadishu. In order to join the training programme, the participants had to promise that they would destroy their weapons at the end of their 6-month training which included literacy and the learning of a skill. After signing the documents in front of a group of elders and other officials, each one of them was recorded on camera, with their weapon in hand, saying that they had understood that they were to destroy their weapon at the end of their training. Signatures do not mean much, but spoken words do.

³⁰⁶ Somalis like to quote the following proverb to show that conflicts are inherent to human nature: *"the teeth and the tongue are close neighbours, yet they bite each other."*

It is illustrated by the Somali proverb “*meel xinijir lagu bururiyay xab baa lagu bururiya*”—a baby should be born at the spot where blood has been spilt. However, when Somalia had a government ensuring conflict resolution through courts and tribunals, the traditional ways of making peace had fallen into disuse. Particularly after the Socialist Revolution which tried to remove the clan system, the paying of blood price to compensate for the killing of a person was prohibited. Such practices have currently been largely reinstated and it seems that as soon as a conflict begins, elders are called to meet and negotiations commence.³⁰⁷ More than a dozen of such meetings take place in Somalia every year.

Those meetings come under the general term of *shir*. The *shir* was the centre of political and social life in pre-colonial Somalia, the place where all decisions pertaining to the life of the community were made. Opposing parties came to plead their cause in a judgment; decisions were made about moving cattle, and about war and peace. As in many other African cultures, the elders met under a tree which became the *Geedka heerka*, the tree of justice, or *Geedka Haqqa*, the tree of Truth.³⁰⁸ Since the only ‘weapon’ at those meetings was speech, poets were called upon by the different parties to plead their cause and influence the audience to take their side. The head of the clan (*boqor*) had a poet (*baane gabayaa ah*) as a member of his council. When it came to issues of peace and war, the poet would be called to compose a poem celebrating the new agreements and spread the word that the peace and harmony between the clans had been restored.

With the resurgence of the clan, such meetings are taking place in very much the same way as they did in the past. The difference today is that the meeting may not be held under a tree, but in a hotel room or in a private home. Many of the elders carry with them cell phones which often, in the middle of the meeting, ring in the melody of the Somalia national anthem or some other well-known patriotic song.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ Between 2000 and 2003, I co-directed two organisations MCC and EMM (Mennonite Central Committee and Eastern Mennonite Missions) whose main mandate in Somalia since 1991 has been to facilitate peace-making. We were involved in the support of many of the meetings initiated by elders.

³⁰⁸ Said Samatar gives thorough descriptions of those meetings in his book Samatar, Said, *Oral poetry and Somali nationalism The case of Sayyid Mahamad Abdille Hasan*, African Studies Series 32, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

³⁰⁹ I attended such a meeting in Eastleigh, a suburb of Nairobi, where two sub-clans of *sheraal*

A *shir* would typically start with words of welcome from the convening party with the appropriate response from the invited group, followed by the reading of the Koran and a short prayer led by an iman or a religious leader. The discussion will then start with each party and its representative taking turns to speak. If things go well, they will decide on a committee to pursue the talks. These discussions are lengthy and can go on for weeks as decisions are made by consensus and all parties must be given a chance to air their views. The clan that called for the meetings is expected to feed and provide for the members of the other clan for the duration of these meetings. The discussions can also become very heated, with people threatening to leave. This is when the poet is called on to intervene in the discussions. His intervention can be crucial in getting the talks back on track as occurred between two sub-clans of the Makane held in Belet Weyne in 2002. The participants could not agree on the composition of the committee until the elder who presided the meeting called on the poet to compose a poem. This poem praised the qualities of the two clans present and reminded them of their previous harmony. After this intervention, the problem was solved and the meetings could be held.³¹⁰

The same pattern is followed in regional or national peace conferences. In such cases, however, the poet will not intervene directly during the meetings but will speak or sing during moments of recreation. Often festivals of music or recitation of poetry are organised alongside these meetings, in a hotel or conference hall. The purpose of these gatherings is to encourage the participants at the conference to make peace and come to an agreement since the talks are always lengthy and difficult. During the peace process which took place in Arta during 2000, a Fest' Horn was organised, advertised as a "*Regional music festival...for a culture of peace dedicated to Somalia*."³¹¹ Many Somali poets appealed—through songs denouncing the ills of war, and advocating for peace and unity—to the participants to come to an agreement. As the present peace conference has been going on in Kenya for almost two years now

met to resolve some longstanding conflicts. The meeting was held in a room with mats laid on the floor but the two sultans sat on higher seats.

³¹⁰ The information was given to me by Mustafa Haji Ahmed, an elder of the Gajeel, who presided over the talks as a third party. Unfortunately that particular part of the week-long talks was not recorded.

³¹¹ In the Djiboutian newspaper, *La Nation*, 4 May 2000.

(it started in October 2002), in order to get the Somali people to support the process, a peace caravan was organized by Somali poets. With this initiative, they were hoping that the people would pressurise their clan warlords to come to an agreement. The BBC reported on the event as follows:

Somali poet marches for peace

Somali artists have been marching for peace as faction and government leaders at talks in Kenya fail to agree the formation of a transitional government and a national assembly. The Hadraawi Peace March, after Somali poet Muhammad Ibrahim Warsame Hadraawi, on Saturday reached the southern port town of Kismaio after covering the 500km from the capital, Mogadishu, in less than a week.

Accompanied by his fellow poets, writers and musicians, Mr Hadraawi said that the march is part of his new initiative to persuade the Somali people to forgive each other and live together in peace in their homeland.³¹²

Several songs have been composed to lament the war and appeal for disarmament³¹³, but there are also others that tell of the suffering of women, for example the poem of Maxamed Tukaale ‘*The voices of the women*’. It begins with a resounding, “*we the women*.”³¹⁴ Nevertheless, no matter how capable the men seem to be to discuss women’s trials, the women themselves are capable of raising their voices in their own name.

Women and peace poetry

As earlier described, traditionally, only men were included in reconciliation meetings between clans. The women’s role was secondary and passive. Some Somali women are of the view that they were offered up as sacrificial lambs for the sake of peace. However, since the civil war, women have acquired an economic power that they did not have before. With the collapse of the government and of the industry, many

³¹² BBC report posted on the web on Monday, 21 July, 2003.

³¹³ In the booklet *Apocalypse* Mohamed Abdi Mohamed translated many of them into French. One of these is a poem by Abuukar Xasan Weheliye and Yusuf Adan, asking the Somalis to lay down their weapons; see Mohamed Abdi Mohamed, *Voix d’Encres*, Montélimart, 1994, p. 20.

³¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 27, but in French “*nous les femmes*”

men have been rendered unemployed. Women, being more resourceful and concerned about the welfare of their families, have engaged in petty trade to provide for their family. Some have become rather successful and manage big shops, hotels or even hospitals. As men are considered as having been responsible for the chaos and destruction, women have gained the support of the international community. They have acquired a reputation of more reliability and integrity than men. The international community is more likely to fund projects managed by women. Additionally, the donors' insistence that women be represented in peace talks has encouraged them to take a front seat in rebuilding their country. On the other hand, as clearly documented by the book *Somalia between peace and war: Somali women on the eve of the Twentieth Century*³¹⁵, the situation of the Somali woman today is still very difficult. With the rise of Islam fundamentalism, the civil war has caused a loss of women's rights³¹⁶ and they have less freedom than they did before the collapse of the government.

The woman poet is not a novelty in the Somali society; women have always composed poems and songs but these are not as well-known because they did not perform them in public where men were present. They were usually performed at women's gathering during various celebrations such as the birth of a child (40 days after the birth) or weddings. Although the baraanbur is the best-known genre, women compose other poetic songs. Some are lullabies which have shorter verses and a different rhythm like this traditional one where the woman addresses a crying child:

*Sidii wax dhashoo la tuuray
Ama wax dhul laga heeshoday
Maxxad dhayalka ugu oyday?*

You have not been abandoned
or left without love, or bitten by a mosquito
So why are you crying for nothing?

Although it is a women's genre, men have composed poems using this form of short verses for some of their poems. The poet 'Hadrawi' has used it to compose one of his most popular song whose first two lines are:

*Maxaan acdaraha aduunka
Kusoo jiray waayaheeda*

How many times in this world
have I faced humiliation?

³¹⁵ Matt Bryden, *Somalia between peace and war: Somali women on the eve of the Twentieth Century*. Unifem, Nairobi, 1998.

³¹⁶ She was given equal rights under the government of Syad Barre which caused the anger of the religious community.

Women who took an active role in the fight for independence created patriotic poems to support the men's struggle long ago. Some of those poems were vindictive but others called the men to peace. Kalimo Godone composed this one:

Asayba dumarku qaadaan dharaar walbaba
Women are made widows every season

Diricyadii qabayna haadbaa duleed ku cuna
Their heroes are eaten away by vultures

Waryaan naloo darine soomaaliyey istaag
O Somalis stop fighting before things get worse

Doxada iyo hawdka iyo meesha taranta badan
In the valleys and the areas with good grazing

Daaqi kari waayey geelii dareeri jirey
The camels which used to roam there can no longer graze

Waryaan naloo darine soomaaliyeey istaag
O Somalis stop fighting before things get worse³¹⁷

The following song was composed by Xaawa Jibrill in 1948:

Darriqa Hobyood warkay nooga soo direen
The news I heard from Hobyo

Sidaan u damqaday calooshaydi wali ma demin
has hurt me to the depths of my soul

Raggii na daafici lahaa bay haddeer dileen
they massacred men who had defended us

Dambi la'aan bay ku laayeen sagaashan diric
they have slain 90 courageous men for nothing

Yaan na loo darine soomaliyeey is daa!
O Somalis, stop fighting!³¹⁸

This plea was made to the Somali men more than 50 years ago. Xawa Jibrill made it again in Djibouti in 2000 when she addressed the delegates of the Arta peace conference:

Illahay baa awood lee ma aaminnaa?
And if we put our trust in God ?

³¹⁷ The translation given here in English is the one made by Zainab Mohamed Jama.

³¹⁸ This poem with a French translation was quoted in an article written by Kadar Ali in the Djiboutian newspaper *La Nation*, 6 July 2000, under the heading "Arta/Conférence Somalienne".

Dawlahada afrikaanka oo IGAD u awaal tahay
in the name of the African countries and first of the Igad

Ururka carabta oo magacennu ku isman yahay
and of the Arab league that we belong to

Inti ifka joogta oo diintoodu tahay islam
and of the Islamic world which is our family?

Jabuuti khayrkay adorosaysa ma aqbalnaa?
And if we accepted the call of Djibouti³¹⁹

It is not only at the Djibouti conference that the women addressed the men asking them to make peace. In more traditional settings, the women who are not always invited to elders' meetings ask to meet the leaders of warring parties and then challenge them to make peace. Amina Mohamoud Warsame tells³²⁰ how after the Northern region of Somalia had seceded from the rest of the country to create its own state, members of the Somalia National Movement who had fought to defeat Syad Barre, began to turn against each other. It is then that the following poem was sung to the men:

Hayga dumin qabilga
Shatter not, my newly mended heart

Durba ii bugsaday
Force me not to the refugee life

Hay saarin debedii
Where cold, hunger and misery reside

Diilaalyadii ka reystoo
For I have just tasted the comfort of home

Dugsi baaban seexdee
Kill not the surviving heroes

Hayga dilin Hayley
Who miraculously escaped death

Dabkii hore ka Hadley
Crush not the handicapped ones

Ha duqaynin naafada
For they have barely recovered

Dirqii bay ku kabante

³¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

³²⁰ Warsame, Amina Mohamoud, *Queens without Crowns: Somaliland women's changing roles and peace bulding*, Amina Mohamoud Warsame, Life and Peace Institute, Upsala, Sweden.2002.

Young man with the gun

Dabka wiilka ridayow

Whom are you shooting? Me?

Cidi kuma duljoogtee

For there is no enemy in sight

Maanaad I dilaysaa?

Have you ever seriously wondered?

Aaway danabyadeenii?

What became of our brave fighters?

Daarihii maxaa helay?

Whatever happened to all our buildings?

A very interesting situation gave rise to a poem composed by Anab Xasan. It happened in 1998 when the men were elaborating the constitution for the new autonomous region of Puntland. Being very conservative Muslims, they did not want women to be members of the new government that they were setting up. Anab Xasan then came and recited this poem, worth quoting in its entirety as it gives such an accurate account of Somali women's condition as well as their role in peacemaking.

Dalka haystaa aan idiin-ka haajirnee

Haween waa duu/jannaa oo dakana magalo

Nin doorka ma dilaan to willkii ay dhaleen

Dabin intay kuu dhigaan ruuxna kuma dagaan

Dulmi ma qaataan oo xaaraan ma dadabsadacan

Ee ragow dabkaad shiddaan baan ku daadanaa

Haddaan haween nahay shaqada heeggan baan u nahay

Habeen iyo maalin hawl baan u taagannahay

Hanuun baannahayoo "ubadkaanu kala hurnaa

Habeenkoo bartegeyna odaygacan u hawl galaa

Markay nahaleesho awlaadu waan hurnaa

Sagaal biloodoo horlaan uurka ku hinjinnaa

Habeen kii foosha cidladaanu habannaa

Waliba ragoo hurdaan ubadaka sii habnaa

Sidii neef hebeddaan hadba naxis u hoorinaa

Hadal yar oo la isladhaafaa raggu hilihishaa

Oo hoyga iyo ubadka horay naagta uga diraan

Horin sameesayoo meherkeeda kahambadaa

Si uu kuhodmo ayuu aqalkeeda kala haraa

Sharciga kii loo hordhigay waaba nahandadaa

Intaas oo hada1 ah maragoodii baan hayaa

Xiliga aan joogno ragu waa inuu hubsado

Ama dalkii haysta aan idinka haajirnee

*Dadaalku markuu habsaamoo waanu hiilinaa
 Kama harnee nimanka hareertan kataaganahay
 Heshiiska iyo nabada horay baan utaagannahay
 Hannaankii dawladnimo heegan baan unnahay
 Hankayaga iyo taladayada waad habaabisaan
 Wixii aan hubino haan baad ku aaburtaan
 Dheeftii aan helilahaa baad hambootsataan
 Haween baad-tahaye hoos u foorarso baad dhahdaan
 Hadaynmaan hubin hawshaan ku aadannahay
 Heshuska iyo xeerka aan haatan lagu salaysnayn
 Raggow waan kaahurudnayee waa inoo hadaba*

Keep the land, we emigrate
 Women are heavenly folk and rarely commit cruelty and injustice
 They do not massacre heroes and sons they breastfed
 They do not deliberately plot or set up traps for a soul to fall into
 They neither condone exploitation nor indulge in forbidden bread
 But oh men, we succumb into the fires you ignite
 We women are always ready for work and the general well-being
 Day and night we toil and labour for the greater good
 We are coaches refereeing the children
 Then at night, we dutifully satisfy the husbands
 At the touch of the fertilizing seed, we become ill with pregnancy
 We support the infant in our stomach for yet another nine months
 At the night of labour, we seek strength from the empty space
 While you are still asleep we stay awake feeding the infant
 Like a tamed beast offers one breast at a time
 And yet Men are incensed by the slightest domestic discord
 For that, they chase away the woman from her home and children
 With prepared justification, they deny her marital rights
 To enlarge their wealth, rob what is rightfully hers
 He who is called for arbitration terrorizes women, blaming them for the broken home
 All those accusations are not fabricated and I can summon witnesses to prove
 Oh men, why don't you realize the difficult circumstances that we are now facing?
 Or, keep the land and we will emigrate
 When the rhythm for rebuilding slows down, we rally and mobilize
 For the purpose, we are always beside men, never behind them
 We are at the forefront for peace and reconciliation
 We are ready with what it takes to resurrect good government
 But you men render lost our advice and inspirations
 You suffocate our intellect, so it never sees the daylight
 You grab and swallow all benefits due to us
 Bend down -- you are a woman, is all you say to us
 If you don't rethink and vividly acknowledge the role women play
 And institutionalize it in modern and customary laws
 Be warned, we are now awakening after a long sleep and passivity.³²¹

³²¹ Anab Xasan, *Gaalkayo*. Quoted in *Rebuilding Somalia: issues and possibilities for Puntland*, WSP Somali Program 2001, Chapter 7 'The Role of Women in Rebuilding Puntland', main researcher Faiza A. Warsame. p. 290.

The poem stands out in its boldness—not only does it assert the value of women but also denounces the ill treatment of men towards women. The last verse even goes further; it is a threat thinly veiled as a warning. The tone of the poem, its straightforwardness and the warning at the end show the strength that Somali women can have and dispels many preconceived notions on the power of women have in the society. Because the Somali society is patriarchal, women are often pictured as helpless and silent victims. However, an interesting point in this saga is the reaction of the men.

*It is reported that, when she finished, there was a moment of silence in the room and that there were tears in many men's eyes. When asked again if anyone rejected the inclusion of women in the formation of the government, no dissenting voice was raised.*³²²

Many other examples could be given of women's intervention in local conflicts. The intervention follows the same pattern. Fighting starts between two factions and people are killed. A women's delegation requests a meeting with faction leaders.³²³ They present the case for peace in songs and poems; the men, moved by their appeal, promise to put an end to the conflict. Although it is difficult to measure the actual impact of these actions, there is no doubt that they contribute to ending the hostilities. There are many more poems that have been composed by women to call men to peace and unity, often during regional meetings of elders. Some of these poems have been transcribed.³²⁴

The next poem, which will serve as concluding remarks, was composed by a young girl who recited it to a group of elders during a conflict in the region of Sanaag in 2002.

*Plastic bags come in handy
At times like these
Plastic bags are light
Let my mother have one
She needs to stuff in our property
All that is important to carry
It is time to run
Before we get caught up in the fight*

³²² *Ibidem*, p. 290.

³²³ The organisation Save Somali Women and Children, whose head Asha Elmi is a poet, has realized such actions in Mogadishu.

³²⁴ In the book of Matt Bryden *Somalia between peace and war: Somali women on the Eve of the Twentieth Century* Unifem, Nairobi, 1998, several *barranbur* from different parts of Somalia are quoted.

*My mother owns only one back
To carry me, my old grandma
Hawa, Halima, and little Yusuf
I hope I can run faster
So as to give little Yusuf and
Grandma a chance
To ride on my mother's back
The plastic bag is heavy
It contains kibis, water, and
mugmad
I hope Mummy can afford
To buy survival items
It's as expensive
As the heavy load on her back
Will Mummy manage?
Oh, what a burden she has to carry
During these times of war³²⁵*

In the midst of a chaotic and uncertain world, women continue to make life possible for a society in disarray. They do it through their work but they do it also through their poetry. They do it in not only in Somalia, but also in the diaspora. Their poetry is not just about men laying down weapons; it is also intended to celebrate because in times of war, one tries to take every possible opportunity to find things to celebrate about. The shiny clothes are brought out, the spicy incense burned, the henna designed in arabesques on feet and hands, and the poetesses called out. Then the party can begin. It could be the traditional celebration of a wedding or the termination of a workshop. In true Somali fashion, the songs will be poems of praise; praise for the families of the newly-weds if it is a wedding, or in praise of a donor if it is a workshop. If the poem has particularly moved the women, they will gather in the middle of the room to dance to the beat of the drum. They will shower money on the head of the poet or remove one of their golden necklaces to put it around her neck. Life goes on!

The resilience of women in Somalia today is the image of the resilient nature of a poetry which refuses to die as it is always being reborn. The Somali society, has reached into its rich cultural past to strengthen and face a very challenging present. It has done so because the past is not a straitjacket confining the society to a barren stillness. The adoption of

³²⁵ Translation given by Fadumo Jibrill and quoted in, *MCC Peace Newsletter*, April/June 2003, p. 8.

modern technology for the transmission of songs and poems is evidence of such an adaptation. From the radio to the numerous websites where Somali songs and poems can be downloaded, oral poetry moves across the world, spanning years. It is both the same and not the same—traditional songs reappear with new lyrics and women give new life to old myths. The peace meetings which were held under trees are held in the halls of modern hotels, and women go to workshops like they went to the well; to gather new information and sing new songs.

One might ask whether it is the past that re-defines the present or the present that re-defines the past. Can the resurgence of the power of the spoken word and the importance of oral poetry, be seen as a form of archaism, as a regression into a pre-colonial past?³²⁶ We believe not. We would rather see it as a rediscovery of what literature is about; not as an artistic creation tied to a silent written sign but rather a creative usage of the polyphony of human language; not an empty form for a few aesthetes to enjoy but the carrier of a message for all the people. It is to be hoped that the message of peace of Somali songs will be heard and that the people will never have again to sing to the rhythm of war.

³²⁶

Or idyllically peaceful.

If you're ugly, know how to sing: aesthetics of resistance and subversion

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Artistic expression plays an important role in the lives of African peoples, providing a forum for participation in the community and for exploring the mysteries of humanity. Oral artistic forms, in particular, such as song, are strategic communal tools for societies in their consolidation and socialization processes, and their spoken nature guarantees their widest circulation (Mphande, 2003: 416). For centuries, singing praises of rulers has been a way of legitimating power and regulating the community in Africa. After attaining independence from European colonization, the art of fashioning political legitimacy through the manipulation of specific cultural aspects of orality that had served the political elite so well in the liberation struggle, was taken to a new level. Orality, by definition, is performance. Performance and its flexibility in a multimedia setting, and the power of the spoken word in a largely illiterate society, were used to political advantage by exploiting its potential for mass communication and multiple interpretations.

Song is one of the best examples of the African imaginative expression. Its role in political discourse is not readily acknowledged, even by those most involved—the singers and artistes themselves. Songs are usually not written down and fixed, and are rarely performed in European languages. Thus, Western-educated political leaders recognize orality as an art form that is not typical of Eurocentric culture, and that is deeply ingrained in black cultural power. Consequently, they have appropriated and deployed the performance skills of song singers and praise poets for political expedience. This art form has become not only the rallying point for a call to an African renaissance and rejuvenation, but also a

vital feature in the public arena of the new political dispensation as is frequently seen at political rallies throughout the continent. Even those post-colonial African leaders who prefer to speak to their people in an ex-colonial European language such as English or French have insisted that praises to them by their followers be composed and sung in the vernacular African languages.

One of the most popular idioms in Malawi folklore says “*ukayipa dziwa nyimbo*” (*if you are ugly, know how to sing*). This idiom highlights the celebrated place of an artist in the African society, and how verbal art skills adequately compensate for any physical shortcomings. African folklore is full of instances where the song enchants a ferocious lion or snake and enables the victim to escape danger. Song enables a kidnapped victim not only to fly to safety, but also to know the correct direction to his home. Folklore in most African cultures has also a designated animal that represents the artiste as the singer of song—in some parts of West Africa, for example, it is *anasi* the spider, in Central Africa *nadzikambe* the chameleon, and in South Africa *fudukazi* the tortoise, hence the popularity of these animal characters even in modern literary writing. What are the consequences of ‘knowing how to sing?’ This chapter will examine the potency of song as a tool in African political discourse. The first section outlines the theoretical constructs that frame the discourse on song performance; the latter section draws examples from the southern Africa region to illustrate the points discussed.

Song in African oral literary traditions reveals the variety and depth of imaginative expression in which African languages sustain the creative activities of African societies. Song is an elaborate form of language set to music, composed and transmitted entirely through the oral medium. As it is based on the spoken word it is, by definition, performance and depends on a live audience for its existence. Since many participants usually perform an oral text, it has a public audience, and it integrates text, performer and audience, thus bringing the community together publicly arena in an interactive manner. Only in performance can the singer hope to engage his audience and be engaged by them in direct dialogue. In this regard, it is a form of social control since it is performed in a public space, volubly for all to hear. It is a form of socialization and legitimates power, indicating what is permissible and what is not. One of the functions of song, therefore, is to promote social cohesion,

to conserve and transmit social consciousness, while simultaneously entertaining the audience.

In southern Africa, social power relations intertwine with inherent oral art forms, so that, if the object of praise is a ruler, the art of praising inevitably becomes the art of criticizing. Songs incorporate some negative characteristics into their subject's praises, marking what is laudable and what should be condemned. Because they deal with contemporary events surrounding the individual in question, songs are documentary, and work as a memory aid in recalling the past. They serve as depositories to the transformations in society and the lives of people, as a record of the peoples' histories, beliefs, and values and the changes that have taken place. They chronicle genealogies that link the present generation to their ancestor thus helping strengthen the common culture and legitimize the claim to power of those in authority. A singer has 'license' to criticize that which he or she considers excessive, arrogant, unusual or unbecoming of the person or position (White and Veil, 1991; Opland, 1983). The censure is not always overt or direct, but the audience and the subject of the criticism must be aware before it can be registered as criticism in the fashion of a 'hidden transcript' (Scott, 1990). In this regard songs are the central local language of politics and are recognized as an important medium of political discourse that reflect the prevailing political atmosphere in the community.

The main themes in oral literature are not only morally instructive, but also have messages to deliver to the audience because they are drawn from their everyday lives. Male singers tend to focus on themes of honour, devotion, character, courage and bravery, manhood, etc. in their songs. Women's songs usually deal with domestic matters, womanhood, filial relationships, jealousy, peace, courtesy and etiquette, agricultural chores, futility of war, etc. In this way, songs are a socially acceptable way of giving public expression to personal emotion. In song and poetry, text and experience are naturalized because they are contextualized within the family, circle of friends, acquaintances and clan members. This familiarity between bard and community means that language is now used as a tool in the struggle for cohesion in society, and for integration of culture with those who might otherwise feel left out, particularly women and the young.

Song is based on stylized language, recognizable through imagery, metaphor, rhythm, rhyme, harmony and tone patterns, enhanced through the vocal mode of delivery. These features are intended specifically to intensify the effect of language and set it apart from everyday communication. They regulate departures from the normal register of everyday speech, and thus help language draw attention to itself—to give pleasure and assume an aesthetic rather than a purely communicative function. It is also these distinctive literary features that enable the society to construct an extensive repertoire of culture heritage. As part of oral narrative, song has always been the most primitive and dynamic form of cultural production of the African literary landscape, and it is considered a mode of performance profoundly embedded in its historical context and social environment. Thus, key to the cohesive force of oral literature is the peoples' pride in their language and history, and hence the language achieves an extraordinary sense of cultural identity.

Song performance consists of repetition. Various configurations of repetition can be used, such as call-and-response, refrain, etc. Repetition can range from one word to a fairly lengthy line, and it can also occur in cyclic fashion where the whole structure is repeated. The fluidity of its structure renders song more suited to improvisation than a written text. Just as the structure and genre boundaries of song are fluid and unfixed, so too is the audience as people at a public performance may arrive and leave at their pleasure. When people return, the performance cannot be 'rewound' to where they left off! Nonetheless, there is a close and intense interaction between artiste and audience, achieved in the call-and-response technique, ululation and body movements among others. Song performance also implies accompaniments, either by dance or musical instruments, or both.

African societies treasure song and other forms of literary imaginative expression as the loftiest and most outstanding examples of their traditional heritage. They make no rigid distinction between sung poetry (song) and recited poetry (praise poem), and sometimes, for example at weddings, they may shift from one to the other in the same performance. Among the things that render oral poetry fascinating are the consistency and cohesiveness of form and content, the linguistic and aesthetic values portrayed, the socio-historical referentiality, the

artiste's intention, the impact and effectiveness of the transmitted experience on the audience, and the universality of a given text. In this case, text refers to the verbal content which the singer memorizes, and upon which he improvises. It also forms part of his training. Because of textual variation that comes with performance, the audience's focus is on the manner of delivery, not just on content. In delivery, literary devices, such as repetition, refrain and call-and-response not only make song poetry appealing but also easily remembered. The power of the oral narrator is his ability to describe the events such that the audience is satisfied that they have a grasp of what happened and why. However, narration of the events can never be neutral and the narrator selects and orders the events in an attempt to influence its interpretation.

Song is a dramatic presentation to an audience which frequently is itself part of the act. Therefore, in interpreting song, the whole social context of the performance must be understood because the singer is performs within the confines of space, time and social context. Typical of oral literature, song does not have attributes of finitude and closure, as is the case with written literature. It has not limited and can be criticized before, during and after 'performance'. Okpewho (1992) distinguishes three aspects of performance: the artistic background and creativity, the scene of performance and the social context. Although the audience's focus is the delivery of text, we should not, however, separate text from context, or even privilege 'text,' when the two are actually inseparable. As performance depends on social context for its interpretation, the text can be contextualized and thus re-interpreted since performers and participants interact in various ways to create context. In order to avoid dichotomizing context "*it is necessary to study the textual details that illuminate the manner in which participants are collectively constructing the world around them*" (Bauman and Briggs, 1990: 69).

Although performance is inseparable from its context of use (Bauman and Briggs, 1990: 70), unlike other types of discourse, for instance political speeches, artistic text do not 'contextualize' to the same extent (Groenewald, 1997: 106). Artistic texts can be decontextualized, because language has the ability to foreground itself and render discourse distant from its immediate environment. Nevertheless "*if text/discourse can be decontextualized from context, it can also be recontextualized into another so that these two become aspects of one process, a process that can*

be mapped by looking at how discourse adapts itself to the new context" (Groenewald, 1997: 76). Groenewald suggests that in the process of contextualization it is necessary to distinguish between "*cues that may have bearing on situation, that is, the micro-context, and those that may have bearing on context, that is, the macro-context*" (1997: 106). The latter refers to socio-political issues, and the former to the more political matters such as time and place.

Song is an inside creation or art because, beyond the rhythm, the lyrics are usually directed to people who understand and share the values articulated in the song, appreciate the constant allusions to specific events or persons and understand the kin relations and landscape features contained in the description. Yet it is precisely these allusions that make song so difficult for outsiders to understand or appreciate and for researchers to transcribe from its oral mode to a written mode. Margaret Read, for example, who recorded praise songs of the Ngoni in northern Malawi in the 1930s complained that most of the "*allusions in the texts were obscure*," and that when she asked local informants they "*did not recognize some of the names or meaning of the attributes*" (1970: 76). Although oral text is variable and dependent on the occasion of performance for its interpretation, as Ruth Finnegan has argued (1985: 51), this is not always the case. In connection with Read's predicament instead of looking for the location of the meaning and references of the allusions in Ngoni songs that she recorded in the vicinity of the contemporary history of the people, she should have sought them in the archives of events current at the time of their original composition (Mphande, 1993). The allusions are in fact located in the history of the Ngoni at the time they were leaving South Africa on their long trek north towards Lake Victoria in East Africa more than a hundred years before these songs were recorded. The attributes thus refer to events that took place in Natal, and not in northern Malawi. No wonder then that a hundred years later some descendants of the Natal migrants in Malawi would find such allusions 'obscure'.

Although the song declares in a 'licensed fashion' what was true at a particular time, through the intervention of history its continued presence in folklore enables it to transcend that original encounter which gave birth to its existence, and assume a permanent significance in man's experience. Thus, the song could be performed in any setting without

loss of relevance because it has now become a bearer of a principle or a particular set of values. As such, the song can be extended, elaborated, reshaped, changed in tone, or reapplied to different circumstances without ceasing to be the original song. Vail and White (1991) contend that the song draws its authority from the fact that everyone can refer back, specifically or by inference, to the occasion of its first performance. In this way, *“a historical intervention has become a reading of history and, hence, a way to transcend that history”* (1991: 42).

Like many other forms of oral literature, song has no genre categories, so that women around a mortar, or workers at a factory or plantation can also use the form and style of praise songs used at the royal court to praise or criticize the chief, or used at parliament buildings to praise or criticize the president. This ability of oral text to move across genres gives it its potency as can be seen by the number of African war songs that Christians adopted for their proselytizing mission. Referring to the situation in northern Malawi again, Read (1937) reports that:

The following song is very popular in Mwambara's [M'mbelwa's] country. It is said to be a lament of the women against the difficulties of polygamous households, and was so used by two Ngoni ministers in recent campaign among the churches. They were speaking against polygamy and used this song which was well known as an illustration... (Read, 1937: 7).

The practice of appropriating African cultural forms of expression for evangelical purpose by Christians was extensive. In an incident at the court of another Ngoni Paramount Chief in central Malawi where the British Provincial Commissioner brought a party of Europeans colonial officials and missionaries to observe traditional oral performances, it is reported that *“when they saw the translations of the Ngoni songs ... and watched the rhythm and dignity of the dances they were so favorably impressed that they asked the Paramount to send senior men to teach the songs and dances to the boys in the mission school”* (Read, 1956: 44; Mphande and Newsum, 1997: 243). These songs thrive for their potency on the combination of religion and political overtones and discourse, qualities which rendered them an easy prey to colonizing agents.

The following section will analyse songs used for protest and political expression. All songs used in this study have been transcribed from tape or audio-visual recordings. In their composition and performance, singers in southern Africa tend to be pre-occupied with economic

issues of survival and fairness. The first example of protest song we are going to examine is a song usually performed at *vimbuza* healing sessions among the Tumbuka people in the Lundazi district in eastern Zambia and the Mzimba district in northern Malawi. The *vimbuza* performance attracts crowds of people. The transcription of the songs was guided by the performers' natural pauses and use of cadence, the recurrent patterns of the material, and the regularly recurring semantic and phonological features.

One distinctive feature of the performance of oral verse associated with song is a traditional multi-part organization of voices. The chorus of the *Anyina Zinthambo* song below, as well as other songs that follow, is divided into two voice-parts, each of which recites a different text. The temporal relationship between these parts is governed by the principle of non-simultaneous entry, in such a way that the chorus "response" follows the narrator's "calling" phrase, the two voices alternating throughout the performance. The voice of the lead singer who introduces the song is allowed to intermingle with the melody provided by the chorus, foregrounding the melodious nature of the lyric that dominates the rhythm of the song. The use of melodious language thus enables listeners to work through the words of the song to arrive at the meaning behind them (Mphande, 2002: 68). In the *vimbuza* song, the mood of the occasion as well as the actual social event is reflected in the lyrics of the songs which guides the choice of themes.

Ku Joni uko

You at Johannesburg

Eeh!

Hello

Ninjani wanihale ine

Who will marry me in levirate?

Amama ahee yaye

No mother, I don't want to

Ku Joni uko

You at Johannesburg

Eeh!

Hello

Ninjani wanihale ine

Who will marry me in levirate?

Amama ahee yaye

No mother, I don't want to

Atola nyapa jilo

He has married 'Miss Modern'

Amama

Yes mother

Nyumba azenga ya njerwa

They've built a brick house

Amama

Yes mother

Chijalo cha phadiloko

With padlocked (steel) door

Amama

Yes mother

Nkhali ya sefuliya

With metal cooking pots

Amama

Yes mother

This song is about the agonies of migrant labour that has disrupted the Tumbuka social order in the present economic set in southern Africa. Under the migrant labour system, thousands of Tumbuka people leave each year to seek opportunities for employment in South Africa and other neighbouring states. Because of the history of South African apartheid laws and the economic and social conditions that they created, women were rarely allowed to accompany their husbands to their place of work. Consequently, some of the men never returned, and others returned with South African women. The song above speculates the husband's amorous encounter with a seductive woman, presumably South African. The woman then comes to the village with the returning husband to destroy the first wife's family by demanding things her husband can ill afford unless it is at the expense of the wife who was left in the village and her children. The new woman prefers things like metallic cooking pots to the village traditional earthenware, a brick house with corrugated iron roofing instead of one out of poles, rafters and mud, with a grass thatched roof. The irony is that the steel door and padlock that the new wife prefers are symbols of isolation, fortification and cold-heartedness—contrary to virtues of village collectivity. The song goes beyond the immediate requirement of the occasion and includes other themes that enable the performer to meet the needs of changing situations and moods, or themes that reflect other concerns of performers or the values of their society.

KuJoni uko! is also a good example of how a *vimbuza* singer uses language to exploit the syntactical properties of language to enhance the semantic content of the song and to celebrate it. In a call-and-response fashion, the audience is invited by the narrator to participate in the discourse between the neglected wife and errant husband before the village gathering of her immediate friends and relatives. The narrator's use of language enables her to present an action or a situation in a way that creates the illusion that we are having a dialogue between the wife and audience. This illusion endows the language with its ability to intensify a situation with dramatised action. Even to the call */KuJoni uko/*, "You there, in Johannesburg!", the audience answers affirmatively

although they are in reality very far from Johannesburg. By asking “*Who will marry me*” (now that my husband has abandoned me), the wife/narrator is acquiescing in a linguistic technique that establishes an illusion of intimacy with the audience. The text of this song may change because in Tumbuka song poetry, textual variations occur, not only from one performance to the next, but also within the same performance (Mphande, 2002: 65).

Recitations or performances of song lyrics are subtly variable in nuance and style, sensitive to content and occasion, and intimately dependent on the performer’s rapport with his audience. In this sense, oral performance is a collective enterprise rather than an individualistic one. The stylistic call-and-response employed in this song should not be regarded as a fixed feature. Details of diction and phrasing are not necessarily built into the structure of the song. In this case, although the first line of the song is immediately followed by melodic */Eeh!/,* variation is achieved only when diction and phrasing are combined. At each stage the narrator creates interplay between the refrain and the rest of the song. Exact memorisation and identical reproduction do not seem to be essential in this process. The narrator can shift the lyrics around so that a rendition of the same song differs in wording. The artistry of the narrator and his mastery of language are the primary merits of the best performers.

One of the most prevalent ideas in African song and oral literature is that of the prodigal child, whether it is about the lazy millipede who ignored her mother’s advice and eventually starved to death, or the jealous boy who killed his brother only to be told on by a bird that refuses to be killed. However, the theme of the prodigal can only work on the acceptance by the audience of presupposed paternal love and trust, and it is this aspect of the prodigal child motif that makes it an attractive metaphor for political commentary. The prodigal motif is also an organizing poetic structure, particularly for historical narratives. Many narratives deploy animal characters, and this enables the literature to transcend not only time, but also the material space of man to become truly ‘universal’, as illustrated by the following pestle-and-mortar song of Tumbuka women against a polygamous man:

Chimbwe walila usiku wose
Hhhhu Hhhhu Hhhhu!

A hyena has howled throughout the night

Kanalume kamitala kakugona zule
Yayi a Nyirongo yayi mwe!
Hhhhu Hhhhu Hhhhu, Walila!

A polygamous man does not sleep
No, Mr. Nyirongo, I don't approve

The song disapproves of polygamy in society, portraying the polygamous man as a hyena, i.e., a sleepless thief prowling the night, an insatiable animal that covets and devours everything in its path. The song equates the hyena to Mr. Nyirongo, a very common Tumbuka surname, and thus the attack is not necessarily on a single individual but on whoever practices polygamy in that village.

When we move from the more domestic setting of the home and husband-housewife relationships, we find that songs tend to deal with the theme of the prodigal child. This is the child who moves away from the security of the home, willingly or by due to circumstances, and gets corrupted in the process. The moral force of this prodigal child motif as a literary metaphor is the aspect of the collective as opposed to the individual. African societies have always emphasized the communal values over the individualistic, and languages are full of examples that highlight this aspect of the culture. For example, the Tumbuka people say: *njowe yimoza nthu yikutinya nyinda* "one finger does not crush lice", or *bantu bakwenda bawili ndiwo bakwimba mingoli* "one person cannot sing call-and-response all by himself", or *kali kekha nkhangama* "the one who is alone is an easy target" (i.e., like a hunted animal). The language thus depicts anything individualistic as anti-social, and should be discouraged by society. Memory is considered a collective phenomenon of the individual, and private memory is viewed suspect. Narratives about the chief's heroic deeds may refer to deeds of individuals, but these deeds are always depicted as collective. The oral textual referentiality of the prodigal son motif was further reinforced by the intervention of Christianity, particularly in rural Africa. The first text as a religious tract to be translated into the vernacular African languages was John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, with all its inherent thematic imports. This text was one of the first Christian tracts that African school pupils were exposed to. This is significant because it affects the way memory is conceptualized. As children memorise a text in school, it influences their thoughts and language because the text is there already. Therefore, it is not by accident that the prodigal motif is such a popular theme in both oral and modern African literature.

The prodigal motif perspective is particularly prevalent in songs dealing with the migrant labour system in southern Africa and its resultant economic hardships on the populations. The following song, *Mtana wami watshona*, in ChiNgoni is very popular in Mzimba district in northern Malawi:

Mtanami (or Mwana wane) watshona
Indaba ya mabande
Hiyo! Aye! Eh!
Indaba ya mabande

My son has not returned
 Because of banding
 Oh yes
 Because of banding

This song was first sung during the 1953–63 ill-fated, settler-imposed Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (i.e., present-day Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). It is a song about the unpopular agricultural policies that the colonial government imposed on rural farmers as part of an attempt to control soil erosion. Most African farmers saw no logic in abandoning their traditional methods of farming for an uncertain white man's experiment, and so strongly resisted it. Besides, what the British and settler agrarian experts demanded with contour ridges, or *mabande*, meant more work for the African farmers that began with the embankments for contour ridging before the rains had softened the soil, and which often had to be worked with rudimentary tools. To curb resistance, the colonial authorities used coercion and imposed fines and imprisonment on those who resisted. This only led to a deepening resentment against the policies and a fear for their land. One consequence of the banding system was an increase of rural people migrating to the urban and mining centres in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe looking for jobs 'easier' than the agricultural contour banding they had left in the village. This song therefore criticised the colonial agricultural practice of banding. The song also criticises the breakdown of the African family where now the son is depicted as opting out, a deserter from his communal responsibilities, a coward.

The song is in ChiNgoni, the language of the Nguni speaking ruling class in northern Malawi and eastern Zambia who had originally migrated from South Africa around the 1820s. *Ku-tshona* means to set, like in 'sunset', to go deep, not to return, to die. In common usage, the word is used for people who abscond from work or overstay while running an errand, and is thus used for migrant workers who fail to

return to their villages at the end of their labour contracts. The phrase /*Mtanami*/ means “my son,” but this phrase is usually substituted by its Tumbuka equivalent /*Mwana wane*/. The noun /*indaba*/, means “reason, cause, matter”. Since /*ku-tsona*/ can mean either abscond or death, the meaning chosen by the audience will depend on the specific circumstances of the performance. ChiNgoni is also the language of the chiefs’ praiser, the *imbongi* or praise poet. Since praise poems are usually performed before Ngoni chiefs, particularly the Paramount, and are meant to honour him or deride him, and also to convey a social or political message, the song demonstrates the incorporative potential of orality in song setting. The ad-mix of ChiNgoni and ChiTumbuka languages in the song also attests to the ability of the oral tradition to change in poetic form and thematic content in response to new realities.

While most of these prodigal sons or *matshona* (plural) never return, some eventually do return to the village, but display a surprising loss of memory of traditional ways. They lack the most rudimentary knowledge necessary to survive in the villages where they grew up, such as which rot-resistant trees to use to build houses, which woods to avoid when fetching firewood for cooking, which poisonous mushrooms to avoid as food, what first aid technique to use in a snake bite, etc. Thus, the migrant labour system in southern Africa is depicted as leading to a drain of indigenous knowledge that also affects the ecosystem, population control and planning as people ignore taboos and forget traditional methods.

After independence, song performers quickly substituted the names of their political leaders, such as Kamuzu Banda, Bakili Muluzi or John Tembo for the strayed son, and the people now used the song with the second meaning prominent when performing at political rallies. The singers regarded the colonial officials as different from the state president; they expected social responsibility and reciprocity from their national leaders, but the relationship sought for mediation with the colonial officials were different due to a more general structural and cognitive order. The lament about a beloved son in the song /*Mtwanami*/ or /*mwana wane*/, who disappears into migrant labour constitutes the asymmetrical structure of relationships. The performer seeks to resolve this distorted structure of relationship and restore the order between

the absent loved son and the lamenting parents; between the harshness of the colonial agricultural tasks in the village and the uncertainty of migrant labour; between family solidarity and the son's betrayal of those filial ties by his non-return; between the past and the present; between the concern of the devoted parents for their son's welfare and the indifference of the colonial system. After independence and departure of the colonial officers, the plight of the subsistence farmers has not changed much. It is because of the distinction between the present political leaders and the colonial officials as addressees, and equating the colonial officials to the current regime that the performers find it easy and convenient to substitute the colonial official's position in the narrative with that of the present leaders of the country because both belong to the same order of relationships concerning their unresponsiveness and non-reciprocity.

In song performance it is important to pay close attention to the lyrics of the song because the audience always pays attention to them. At specific points, the song performance itself is calculated and minimised in order to direct attention to the oral text. It is thus not surprising that the political leaders in Africa today frequently ban or proscribe songs because of perceived political and social comments contained in them. The next example of a song with the folk prodigal motif theme displays a much broader and modern concept of popular culture in the southern African region. The song is titled *A Phiri Anabwera (Mr. Phiri returned)*, composed and sung by a Zambian pop group called Nashil Pichen and Super Mazembe. The song is in Chinyanja, Zambia's national language. Although placed in a rural setting, the song describes the destitute state of a man who, like the case of *Mtanami watshona* in the previous song, had left as migrant labour to either Zambia, Zimbabwe or South Africa. This migrant worker, however, returns to his village of origin, but without any personal possessions:

A PHIRI ANABWELA

<i>A Phiri anabwela kuchoka ku Harare</i>	Mr. Phiri returned from contract work
<i>Anakhalako dzaka zosawelengeka ndithu</i>	Where he had stayed uncountable years
<i>Pobwela kumuzi anabwela ndi sutikesi</i>	He returned with a suitcase
<i>Mukati mwasutikesi munalibe kathu sure</i>	But there was nothing inside the case
<i>Kumudzi anapeza makolo aja anamwalila</i>	He discovered that his relatives had all died
<i>Panalibe muntu aliyinse angawadziwe</i>	There was nobody who knew him
<i>Anayangana m'mwamba, anayangana pansi</i>	He looked up, he looked down

A Phiri ananganiza, chochita s'anachiwone
A Phiri ananganiza, chochita s'anachiwone

He couldn't think of what to do
He couldn't think of what to do

A Phiri anabwela kuchoka ku Harare
Anakhalako dzaka zosawelengeka ndithu
Pobwela kumuzi anabwela ndi sutikesi
Mukati mwasutikesi munalibe kathu sure
Mukati mwasutikesi munalibe kathu sure

A Phiri ananganiza sono nizayenda kuti
Makolo anga onse anamwalila kudala
Phiri ananganiza sono nizayenda kuti

He thought, 'now where do I go?'
'All my relatives died long ago'

Makolo anga onse anamwalila kudala
A Phiri ananganiza sono nizayenda kuti
Makolo anga onse anamwalila kudala
A Phiri ananganiza sono nizayenda kuti
Makolo anga onse anamwalila kudala mama

Koma a Phiri mwachona sure
Mwakhala dzaka zambiri sure
Makolo anu mwaayiwala sure
Mwabwela mulibe ndalama
Mwana mulibe
Nanga chimene mwapeza ndichiyani?
Sorry.

But Mr. Phiri, how could you overstay
You stayed for so many years
Forgetting your relatives
And you have come back penniless
With no family either
So what have you gained?

A Phiri ananganiza sono nizayenda kuti
Makolo anga onse anamwalila kudala
A Phiri ananganiza sono nizayenda kuti
Makolo anga onse anamwalila kudala
A Phiri ananganiza sono nizayenda kuti
Makolo anga onse anamwalila kudala

by Nashil Pichen and Super Mazembe

Note that in the last stanza before the refrain the singer shifts from reported speech to a direct dialogue and engagement with the addressee (the errant migrant worker). This stanza therefore also demonstrates the incorporative potential of call-and-response. This song can also be performed on stage to a large audience, accompanied by music and dance.

Distinct from the rural setting of the previous examples, this song is a testimony to the human suffering that the migrant labour system has caused on the urban-based worker, a person virtually disconnected from his rural roots. It is implied in the song, for example, that when the persona was leaving for the labour camp in a distant country

(here the name ‘Harare’ simply means a place where one goes to seek employment, and does not necessarily refer to the town by the same name in Zimbabwe), the migrant worker left behind a thriving, vibrant village of relatives living under the characteristic communal existence. It is this communal obligation that may have prompted him to seek work in the mines in the first place so as to enable him to make his contribution to the village through payment of *lobola* or bride-wealth cattle, clothes for the elderly, or tuition for school-going siblings. Whatever his motive for seeking employment in the capitalist world, his nostalgia for his village is evident in the tone of the song, and this indicates that the village must have been a treasured, socially prosperous source of his energy. In other words, a village worth returning to after the days of adventure and work are over.

However, for people from neighbouring countries, working in South Africa, Zambia or Zimbabwe is not always a walk in the park. Several tragic stories abound from village returnees; stories of walking through wild thorny bushes, stories of amputees and friends lost in mine disasters, stories of cruel Boer supervisors, stories of many migrant workers killed digging the man-made Lake Kariba in Zimbabwe, stories of urban *tsotsi* (or township gangs), among many more. Indeed, Mr. Phiri’s absolutely empty suitcase in the song “*mukatimmwa sutikesi munalibe kantu sure*”, with its English lexicon at the end, constantly repeated, emphasizes the urbanisation of the worker and the shift in abode from ‘vernacular’ village to anglicised city. The song also implies that his adventure was not a successful one, and it is not necessary to know what happened to lead him to his destitute situation. The entire migrant labour system is exposed through a multiplicity of meaning—it is immaterial whether he spent his money on *skokian* (illicit beer), *mahewu* (gruel), the *shebeen quins* (bar girls), or if it was stolen from him.

The deliberate suppression of details on the individual’s circumstances helps to highlight the tragedy of his home-coming. He finds that his once prosperous village, the memory of which had sustained his life in his migrant state, has been reduced to ruins, with all his parents and relatives long dead, “*makolo anga onse anamwalila kudala*”. Once more, the circumstances of their death is not indicated, whether they died of old age, hunger, neglect or from an epidemic. The death of the parents is therefore a double entendre—it marks a gone-

by era, but it is also an indictment against Mr. Phiri for his negligence of duty by wandering the world when his parents and village needed him. The ecological factor indicated by the presence of the ruins amidst which he now stands is the symbol of the manner in which the village itself judges him—dead, “*mutshona*.” It is now too late for him to make amends. His father, mother, village, children, cattle, all the things he cared for have all ceased to be, leaving only he alive and alone among the ruins. Therefore, the element of tragedy is inherent in the setting of the song itself. The hopelessness of the human condition is symbolised in the ruins that are not only a mark of the past, but also a grave verdict of finality. One cannot go back to the past, or reconstruct it, however hard one may try.

Thus, this song is not only a strong condemnation of the migrant labour system introduced by capitalism, but also a chiding of the individuals who have let this happen, thus participating in the break-up of the African family and social structure in favour of lust for gold. The migrant labour system in southern Africa began with commercial farming and native land appropriation. It intensified with the discovery of diamond, gold, copper and other minerals. The system was eventually codified into the ideology of apartheid, with devastating consequences on the African populations. Consequently, people in southern Africa have a negative attitude towards the migrant labour system and those participating in it. This attitude is attested to in the song, an attitude emanating from specific myths about migrant work in the mines and on the farms. There is a widely held belief, for example, that the migrant mine workers in South Africa are kept on a steroid-type diet that keeps them ‘abnormally strong’ while they are engaged in the mine work but reduces them to utter exhaustion and flabbiness when they return to their villages at the end of their contracts. In Mzimba district in northern Malawi, one sometimes hears the migrant workers referred to as *mitheno*, which means ‘castrated bulls’!

The dehumanisation of the migrant worker is also a pre-occupation of singers and composers in Mozambique. This is apparent in songs recorded during the liberation struggle against Portuguese colonialism. FRELIMO deployed these songs for the war effort, including the following, *Mampara M’gaiza* by Jose Craveirinha, published in *When Bullets Begin to Flower* (Dickinson, 1973).

MAMPARA M'GAIZA

*The cattle are selected
counted, marked
and gets on the train, stupid cattle.*

*In the pen
the females stay behind
to breed new cattle.*

*The train is back from migoudini
and they come rotten with diseases, the old cattle of Africa
oh, and they have lost their heads, these cattle m'gaiza*

*Come and see
the sold cattle have lost their heads
my god of my land
the sold cattle have lost their heads.*

*Again
the cattle are selected, marked
and the train is ready to take away meek cattle*

*Stupid cattle
mine cattle
cattle of Africa, marked and sold.*

(Jose Craveirinha, in Chipasula 1985:106)

NB/ *mampara* is a migrant worker newly returned from the mines of South Africa, also a fool; *migoudini* means the mine

In this poem the migrant worker is referred to as “*cattle...selected counted, marked ...and sold... that gets on the train, stupid cattle.*” Migrant workers from neighbouring countries have to go to the South African mines by train. In the villages, the poem says, “*the females stay behind to breed new cattle.*” The migrant worker recruits are described as “*meek*” because of their apparent willingness to participate in such an oppressive system. However, when the migrant worker returns from *migoudini*, he is described and considered by the village as “*rotten with disease, the old cattle of Africa/oh, and they have lost their heads, these cattle m'gaiza*”. There is thus resentment by the villagers who lose their communal labour and siblings to the mines, and by the migrant workers themselves who feel rejected and alienated by the city that had seduced them in the first place with the promise of milk and honey.

Song can also be used in a more overt political protest. The society not only expects this role of the song artiste as a social critic, but also

authorises it through the ‘poetic licence’ tradition. Leroy Vail and Landeg White (1991) in their seminal book, *Power and the Praise Poem*, report an incident where village performers sung an insulting song, directed at government officials in Portuguese Mozambique and got away with it. Asked how they were able to do that, the villagers said it was acceptable “*because the complaint was expressed in song*.” To say things outside the song context would be to invite trouble. The authors then assert that these villagers’ sentiments summarized their research findings, and could thus be presented “*as an aesthetic, a set of assumptions about poetic performance held throughout southern Africa—and perhaps farther afield...*” Furthermore, they claim, many other researchers and writers have noted the phenomenon that the various forms of oral poetry in sub-Saharan Africa are licensed by a freedom of expression which violates normal conventions,

that chiefs and headmen may be criticized by their followers, husbands by their wives, fathers by their sons, employers or overseers by their workers, officials and politicians by their underlings, even Life Presidents by their subjects, in ways that the prevailing social and political codes would not normally permit, so long as it is done through poetry (1991: 43).

Ingoma songs by Ngoni artists in Lundazi district in eastern Zambia and Mzimba district in northern Malawi sung at traditional dances more clearly articulate this socio-political criticism. The traditional political role of ingoma songs dates back to the clash between the Ngoni people and the British colonising officers at the end of the nineteenth century. When the First World War broke out in 1914, the Ngoni Paramount at the time, Chimutunga Jere, refused to allow his men and their products to be exploited for the war effort, saying that the white man’s war in Europe had nothing to do with his people. The following year, during the East African campaign, Chimutunga further challenged the British government’s authority to raise soldiers for the Carrier Corps, and forbade the exercise in his domain. For this the British colonial government deposed him from his throne and exiled him, and the Ngoni became even more firmly placed under colonial rule. Ingoma songs such as the one below record the peoples’ protest at such a humiliation of their chiefs.

*Inkosi Chimutunga Jere
Bambeke egekeni
Inkosi yelizwe*

King Chimutunga Jere
Has been publicly humiliated!
The chief of the land!

Sibabaze hee!!
Sibabaze hee!!
Elizwe liyoneke.
Sibabaze hee!!

We publicly denounce it!!
We publicly denounce it!!
This desecration of the land.
We publicly denounce it!!

The word */beka/* means put, install, place, set; set up as a chief; place in office of authority. */egcekeni/* means openly. */babaza/* means extol, praise, commend, and express admiration or astonishment. Thus, in this song, the praise singer says that since the Paramount was appointed */beka/* to that position at a public gathering or kraal */gcekeni/*, only there in the public arena can he be deposed by the people. The people, he says, still admire or extol */babaza/* their Paramount—and therefore the British have no business deposing and exiling him. The word */beka/* is ambiguous because it can also be used idiomatically to mean molest or defile, and thus condemning the British action as a defilement of Ngoni traditions. Similarly, */babaza/* can also mean ‘astonish’, and thus the line */Sibabaze heee!!* can also refer to the anger of the people at the betrayal of their trust and the humiliation of their king. Subsequent to this incident, all the Ngoni chiefs in Mzimba were reduced to little more than puppets of the British District Commissioner, used for mobilising labour for the tea plantations in the southern Province and mines in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and, of course, for collecting taxes.

Among the Ngoni, resentment against the British colonial state and economic exploitation was intense and widespread, particularly since many of those recruited for the Second World War died. This resentment was evident even among the sympathetic British officers who served with the Malawi (then Nyasaland) soldiers during the First World War, such as the Reverend Robert Hillier Napier (1884–1918) who was killed in the East Africa Campaign. George Shepperson refers to Napier as “*Nyasaland’s only Great War poet of any significance in the English language*” (1990: 13–14). The number of Malawians that died in that war amounted to 4500. Commenting on such heavy casualties, Napier wrote

If men of our race perish it is at least our war, but the crime perpetrated by Europe on Central Africa is this, that our decision to fight has bereaved so many homes in Nyasaland and Rhodesia. Called out to serve in a war he

cannot understand, unsheltered for the most part, scantily clothed and very moderately fed, the native of the [Nyasaland] Protectorate is winning a war and a new domain for Britain, but he often dies in doing it (1990: 15).

It is this desperation, this threat to the Ngoni way of life and the ultimate price of protest that the song captures and gives expression to.

Knowing how to sing can exert a heavy price. The usual impression is that it is only the written word that scares the tyrant, and people point to the number of writers arrested and jailed by totalitarian regimes because of their published works in European languages (e.g. Denis Brutus, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Jack Mapanje and Ken Sarowiwa among the anglophone writers). However, hundreds of songs, song composers and singers have been proscribed in several African countries, including the post-apartheid South Africa. Mbongeni Ngema, a playwright, actor, director, and songwriter and singer with many international awards to his name recently fell victim of the vices of censorship in the new South Africa because of his Zulu song dealing with the relationship between black Africans and South Africans of Indian origin. The song is titled *AmaNdiya* on CD Jive Madlokovu, and the lyrics are as follows:

Leliculo limele indlele abantu ngendlela abaphatheke ngayo

This song represents the way people feel about it

ngokuziphatha kwamandiya kulelizwe

About the behavior of Indians in this country

Kufanele kube nokuxoxisana ukuze kube nokuzwane

There needs to be a discussion until there is agreement

phakathi kwamandiya kanye nomzansi Afrika

Between Indians and others in South Africa

Chorus

Ho — madoda! Ho — zinsazwa zakithi!

Ho — elders! Ho — our youth!

Kufunele indoda enesibindi ezoqondana nomandiya;

There are needed brave male elders to confront the Indians

ibukhuni lendabo isifuna ukubekelwa amadoda.

The difficulty of the matter needs to be resolved/tackled by male elders

Amandiya awafuni ukushintsha asehlule noMandela

Indians don't want to change, they rebuffed even Mandela

Kusakuqcono abelungu sasazi ukuthi impi yombango.

It was better with Whites; we all knew it was a political struggle

Nani baphathi bezwe anifuni ukuyingena lendaba
Which leaders of the country want to intervene in the matter?

Amandiya awavoti; mayevota avotela abelungu
Indians don't vote, and when they do they vote for Whites

Kodwa agcwele ipalamente; agcwele uhulumeni
Yet they are full in parliament, they are full in the government

Hawu! Buthelezi kodwa uthuli uthini abantwana bakaGgengelele
Listen! Buthelezi, but you keep quiet when children of Ggengelele,

BakaMnyamana bedlala amandiya;
Those of Mnyamana are tricked/exploited by Indians

Uzulu akanamali bedlala amandiya
The Zulu people have no money, exploited by Indians

Baphi oNdebele? Baphi oMntwana Gideon Zulu?
Where is Ndebele? Where is Prince Gideon?

Hawu Ndebezitha! Akavuke uDabulamanzi
Listen Prime Minister! Wake up Dabulamanzi

Angizonge ngimbone uDlamini ethutha eyokwakha eNdiya,
I have never seen a Dlamini migrate to India

Nangu uGumede ethekweni akanandawo yo kulala.
There is Gomede in Durban who has nowhere to sleep

Sihlupheka kanjena-nje ethekweni izinto zethu zathathwa amandiya
We suffer like so in Durban; Indians have taken away our properties

kodwa ajika futhi acindezele abathu bakithi
But on top of that restrictions are imposed on our people

Umkhize uyakhala ufuna ibhizinisi naye kuWest Street;
Mkhize is complaining; he wants to open a business on West Street

Amvalile amndiya athi ayikho indawo yekurenta
Indians have blocked him, saying there is no space to lease

Nampa abantu bakithi begcwele izitolo zomandiya nsukuzonke
Everywhere our people flock to Indians shops everyday

kodwa amwvalile uMkhize athi ayikho ndawo yokurenta
But they blocked Mr. Mkhize, saying there is no space to lease

Kodwa nani Mbeki nithule nithini masidlala amandiya
But Mr. Mbeki why are you quiet about about Indian exploitation?

Chorus

Ho — madoda! Ho — zinsazwa zakithi!
Ho — elders! Ho — our youth!

Esipingo, Clairwood, eThekweni kugcwele abantu bakuthi bethenga emandiyeni;
Esipingo, Clairwood, Durban people are forced to buy from Indians

Kodwa amandiya awafuni ngisho isitolo sabantu abamnyama.

But Indians don't even allow Black people to open shops

Angizonge ngibona uDlamini ethutha umuzi wakhe elibhekuse eBombay eNdiya.

I have never seen a Dlamini migrate to Bombay build his home in India

Kodwa egcwele iAirport

But they [Indians] are full at the airport

- Mbongeni Ngema

The lyrics of Ngema's song are introduced by the claim that his "*song represents the way many African feel about the behaviour of Indians in this country*," and suggest that South African blacks are mistreated and exploited by Indians. Names like Dlamini and Mkhize are typical Zulu clan names representing Africans who it is claimed are marginalised and are the prime victims of Indian economic dominance in the KwaZulu-Natal province. Ndebele, Gedeon Zulu and Buthelezi refer to the Zulu traditional and provincial political leadership that is implicated in its indifference to the plight of their people, while Mbeki represents the national political leadership. Durban, Isipingo and Clairwood are towns in the KwaZulu-Natal region of South Africa with large Indian populations and business enterprises.

The relative ease with which most Indians have adapted to the economic and political change in South Africa by their presence and strength in the government bureaucracy and business renders them susceptible to the scorn of those who feel left behind by the transformation. South Africa has the largest Indian population outside India. Mbongeni Ngema's critics have charged that in his song he portrays South African Indians as oppressors of black Africans. For this reason, Ngema's song is banned from public broadcast and Ngema himself was taken to court and charged with inciting racial hatred and violence. The banning of the song was also advocated under the banner of 'patriotism and nation building,' with all its Banda or Mobutu-style nationalistic overtones. The song and its subsequent proscription have sparked a heated debate in South Africa on Indo-African relations, with some critics advocating that the alleged offending song be expunged from the CD album.

While political leaders were lined up outside Nelson Mandela's

palace to complain against Ngema's song and seek his support for their side of the argument, Ngema rejected the accusation that his song was racist, and argued that his song's lyrics were simply expressing the views of "*black people who gathered at taxi and bus ranks, at shebeens, soccer matches and many other places.*" He contended that the lyrics offered a stimulus to the society's issues and that they should be regarded as a commentary on prevailing social norms that would hopefully lead to reconciliation between the two races. He reiterated that he "...*believe it is my role as an artist to mirror the society and highlight the plight of people on the ground.*" The Zulu monarch, King Zwelethini, also came to Ngema's defence, saying that what Ngema had done was in accord with the Zulu traditional way of expressing concern (<http://www.news.com>).

The South African Broadcasting Complaints Commission, which had earlier banned the song from public broadcast, conceded that "*an argument could be made out that the song is likely to act as a catharsis for those Zulus who feel prejudiced by the economic position of the Indian businessmen,*" and said that they accepted Ngema's stated intention that he wanted "*to begin a constructive discussion that could lead to reconciliation*" through his lyrics. Other artistes and musicians in South Africa also backed Ngema, arguing that artistes are the watchdog of society, and that they sang about contemporary events. Ngema remained popular and sales of his song boomed.

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Songs and Politics in Eastern Africa brings together important essays on songs and politics in the region and beyond. Through an analysis of the voices from the margins, the authors enter into the debate on cultural productions and political change. The theme that cuts across the contributions is that songs are, in addition to their aesthetic appeal, vital tools for exploring how political and social events are shaped and understood by citizens.

Urbanization, commercialization and globalization contributed to the vibrancy of East African popular music of the 1990s which was marked by hybridity, syncretism and innovativeness. It was a product of social processes inseparable from society, politics, and other critical issues of the day. The lyrics explored social cosmology, worldviews, class and gender relations, interpretations of value systems, and other political, social and cultural practices, even as they entertained and provided momentary escape for audience members. Frustration, disenchantment, and emotional fatigue resulting from corrupt and dictatorial political systems that stifle the potential of citizens drove and still drive popular music in Eastern Africa as in most of Africa.

Songs and Politics in Eastern Africa is an important addition to the study of popular culture and its role in shaping society.

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